

Business Enterprise, Consumer Culture and Civic Engagement, 1890s-1930s: Sheffield Entrepreneur, John Graves.

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**Business Enterprise, Consumer Culture and Civic Engagement, 1890s-1930s:
Sheffield Entrepreneur, John Graves.**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Sheffield Hallam University
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Abstract

This thesis examines the activities of Sheffield business man, civic figure and philanthropist, John George Graves from the 1890s-1930s. The original contribution and aim of this thesis is to address a missing piece of historical analysis concerning this businessman's activities, his contributions to the early development of British mail order and consumer culture and his civic and philanthropic engagements in the city of Sheffield.

The thesis consists of seven chapters which are thematically rather than chronologically structured. Chapter one explores the roots of British mail order. It compares and contrasts its development with its American counterparts and evaluates the programmes and initiatives of the three leading British entrepreneurs, J. G. Graves, the Fattorinis and William Kilbourne Kay. Chapter two continues this theme by examining the firms' attempts to address the competition of urban shopping developments, their use of agents and advocates and the agents' association in the development of 'consumption communities'.

While chapter three focuses on Graves' programme of credit, its association with the promotion of self-betterment, self-gratification and its relationship with the rise of suburbia, chapter four examines how Graves reflected issues of gender in his marketing rhetoric. It considers how the firm represented men and women in its advertising narrative, how that narrative reflected issues of separate spheres and how it accommodated the demands of the fashion conscious lower middle class consumer. Chapter five examines the firm's relationship with the British Empire. It explores how the firm attempted to augment its profits and portfolio through an imperial market, how empire was reflected in its sale of commodities and how its advertising rhetoric had the capacity to reflect an imperial ideology related to issues of race, cultural differences and separate identities.

Chapter six concentrates on Graves' business welfare programme. It explores his initiatives alongside those of Cadbury, Leverhulme and Rowntree and argues that the businessmen shared the same approach and values. In addition, the chapter provides evidence that Graves' introduction of his workplace pension scheme pre-dated those of his business contemporaries. Continuing with this theme on welfare, the final chapter focusses on Graves' civic activities. It explores how his entrance into the political and philanthropic arenas shared similarities with his predecessors and how such entrances had been paved through the course of British history. It also examines Graves' progressive and liberal approach as a philanthropist and civic figure along with the contributions he made to the city of Sheffield and the benefits he bestowed upon its citizens.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	vi
Index of images.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Overview.....	1
Methodology and Sources.....	2
Objectives and Synopsis of Chapters.....	4
Chapter 1 - The Development of Mail Order: A Transatlantic Perspective.....	15
Introduction.....	15
The Birth of American Mail Order	16
Mail Order – A British Perspective	24
‘A Business turn of Mind’: Sheffield Entrepreneur, John George Graves	30
J. G. Graves: Politics, Patriotism and Profits.....	38
J. G. Graves and the Post Office Dispute.....	40
Summary.....	45
Chapter 2 - Advertising the Advertiser: Agents, Advocates, Catalogues and Counters.....	49
Introduction.....	49
Catalogues and Counters.....	50
Agents and Advocates: Pitheads and Public Houses.....	59
The Agent and the Penny Capitalist.....	62
From Aberdeen to Exeter: A Business of Recruitment.....	64
Women: The Unofficial Agent.....	66
Agents, Advocates and the Development of Consumption Communities.....	68
Summary.....	73
Chapter 3 – Captivating an audience.....	76

Introduction.....	76
A Business of Mail Order: J. G. Graves, Credit and Consumption.....	77
A Consultant for Personal Growth: Concepts and Consumption.....	85
Captivating an Audience: An Object Lesson of Britishness.....	89
J. G. Graves: Selling to Suburbia.....	94
Suburbia: Consumption, Controversies and J. G. Graves.....	102
Summary.....	105
Chapter 4 – Mail Order and Gendered Representations.....	107
Introduction.....	107
Fashioning Freedom? A Gendered Approach to Advertising.....	108
Complying with Nineteenth Century Domestic Ideology?.....	113
Fashion, Fripperies and Freedom: Mail Order and the Representation of Women.....	117
An Appreciation of Sophistication: Language and Labels.....	122
Bibs, Braces and Bowler Hats: J. G. Graves and the Male Consumer.....	125
Titles, Labels and the Concepts of Class.....	131
Summary.....	135
Chapter 5 – J. G. Graves: A Dutiful Servant of Empire.....	137
Introduction.....	137
Business and Politics: Trading with the Empire.....	140
A Modernising Approach: The Service and Foreign Department of J. G. Graves.....	143
Imperial Persuasion: The Opportunities of Advertising.....	146
Imperial Persuasion: Service to the Colonies.....	148
Imperial Persuasion: Patriotism and Politics.....	152
Imperial Persuasion: The Grandeur and Minutiae of Consumption.....	156
Imperial Persuasion: Consuming Identities.....	162
Consumption and the Imperial Citizens of the Future.....	165

J. G. Graves: An Ambassador of Empire.....	170
Summary.....	172
Chapter Six – Occupations, Opportunities and Business Welfarism.....	175
Introduction.....	175
Occupations, Opportunities and Women of the Workplace.....	175
A Programme of Business Welfarism: Pensions, Poverty and Providence.....	182
Business Welfarism: Productivity, Profits and People.....	193
Beyond the Factory Gates.....	199
Summary.....	202
Chapter Seven – J. G. Graves: Sheffield’s Fairy Godfather?.....	204
Introduction.....	204
Sheffield Light and Enlightenment.....	205
J. G. Graves: From Pedlar to Philanthropist.....	211
Summary.....	219
Main Conclusion.....	221
Bibliography.....	227

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Index of Images

1. J. G. Graves serving as an apprentice ‘Some Memories’	p.32
2. J. G. Graves Pocket Watch Advertisement. Receipts & Adverts (1897-8)	P.36
3. J. G. Graves Pocket Watch Advertisement. North Devon Journal (April, 1901).....	P.36
4. J. G. Graves Pocket Watch Advertisement Receipts & Adverts (1897-8).....	P.36
5. J. G. Graves Marketing Pamphlet.....	p.39
6. J. G. Graves Marketing Pamphlet.....	p.39
7. J. G. Graves Marketing Pamphlet.....	p.39
8. J. G. Graves Marketing Pamphlet.....	p. 39
9. J. G. Graves’ employees march through Sheffield during Post Office dispute.....	p.44
10. J. G. Graves caricature of victory celebration.....	p.45
11. J. G. Graves Pocket Watch Advertisement. <i>Opportunities</i> (June, 1905).....	p.90
12. Britannia Pocket Watch Advertisement. Receipts & Adverts (1897-8).....	p.91
13. The King’s Lifeguards. <i>Opportunities</i> (circa 1930).....	p.91
14. ‘On active Service’ <i>Opportunities</i> (circa 1916).....	p.92
15. ‘Graves’ Gramophones’ <i>Opportunities</i> (circa 1917).....	p.93
16. Graves National Radio Receiver J. G. Graves Catalogue (circa 1930s).....	p.97
17. Graves National Radio Receiver. J. G. Graves Catalogue (circa 1930s).....	p.97
18. Graves National Radio Receiver. J. G. Graves Catalogue (circa 1930s).....	p.97
19. J. G. Graves Catalogue Front Cover (Autumn, 1935).....	p.98
20. J. G. Graves Catalogue Front Cover (Summer, 1929).....	p.99
21. J. G. Graves Catalogue Front Cover (Summer, 1933).....	p.99
22. J. G. Graves Catalogue Front Cover (Spring, 1938).....	p.99
23. J. G. Graves Catalogue Front Cover (April, 1939).....	p.99
24. Cutlery Advertisement. J. G. Graves Catalogue (1935).....	p.100
25. Vacuum Cleaner Advertisement. J. G. Graves Catalogue (circa 1910).....	p.109
26. Drapery Sale. J. G. Graves Catalogue (circa 1917).....	p.115
27. Mrs Bull’s Multi Product Catalogue (circa 1917).....	p.115
28. ‘The Contour Corset’. J. G. Graves Catalogue (circa 1900).....	p.119
29. ‘Fashionable Gowns’ J. G. Graves Catalogue (Autumn, 1935).....	p.123
30. Ladies Coat Sale. J. G. Graves Catalogue (Summer, 1929).....	p.124

31. J. G. Graves 1930s Tailoring Service Catalogue.....	p.126
32. Men's Suits. J. G. Graves Catalogues (1939).....	p.131
33. Men's Suits. J. G. Graves Catalogues (1939).....	p.131
34. J. G. Graves Fashions for Boys (circa 1920s).....	p.132
35. Men's Footwear. J. G. Graves Catalogues (1938).....	p.133
36. J. G. Graves Tool Catalogue (circa 1930s).....	p.134
37. Kettles sold by J. G. Graves (circa, 1902).....	p.157
38. 'The Africa Alarm Clock' Kay & Company Catalogue, (circa, 1890).....	p.158
39. Men's Footwear J. G. Graves Catalogue (circa 1930s).....	p.159
40. J. G. Graves Pocket Watch Advertisement. Lloyds Weekly (September 16, 1900). p.	161
41. Image Egyptian souk Kay & Company Advertising Literature (1923).....	p.164
42. Children's Dolls. J. G. Graves Catalogue (circa 1930s).....	p.166
43. Sale of Toys. J. G. Graves Catalogue (circa 1930s).....	p.166
44. Sale of Toys. J. G. Graves Catalogue (circa 1930s).....	p.167
45. Sale of Toys. J. G. Graves Catalogue (circa 1930s).....	p.167
46. Female Barrel Turner. J. G. Graves Enterprise works (circa 1902).....	p.177
47. Correspondence Office of J. G. Graves (circa 1902).....	p.177
48. Typing Section of J. G. Graves (circa 1902).....	p.177
49. Accountancy Department of J. G. Graves (circa 1902).....	p.178
50. Audit Department of J. G. Graves (circa 1902).....	p.178
51. 'Westville'. Head Office of J. G. Graves (1929).....	p.194
52. Roewood Athletic Ground (November, 1903).....	p.200

Introduction

This thesis is a case study of John George Graves, a businessman and prominent civic figure operating in Sheffield during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Graves developed his business acumen through a period of apprenticeship, peddling and experimenting with small-time mail order sales, the experiences of which led him to become a leading forerunner in the retailing sector of British mail order. Sharing the stage with other well-known mail order entrepreneurs, and particularly the Fattorini family of Bradford (Empire Stores) and Kay's of Worcester, these three eager and astute business operatives popularised this activity of retailing to a wide and socially diverse audience of British consumers. By the late 1890s, Graves' business was firmly establishing itself and by 1903 it was heralded as one of the country's 'most up-to-date enterprises [in which Graves] stood almost alone'.¹ Supplying a vast range of commodities across Britain and the empire, the firm's staff numbered over three thousand and ranged from administrators, accountants, technicians and artisans to tailors, managers, cooks, clerks and cleaners.² The firm's own advertising and printing department compiled and circulated its own mail order catalogues, *Opportunities*. Designed to whet consumer appetites and maintain their attention through enticing sales narrative, imagery, offers of credit and engaging articles and features, the catalogues played a central role in the firm's rapid growth and popularisation. By 1903, the business had moved its central administration and warehousing to a large and imposing new facility on the outskirts of Sheffield. With its imposing façade, flag poles, gardens and modern facilities, 'Westville', suggested *The British Architect*, was 'in every way fitting to meet the needs of modern times'.³ In addition to these modern and impressive facilities, Graves also immersed himself in a programme of business welfarism. As this thesis will demonstrate, Graves' approach to matters of business welfare shared many of the values of other likeminded businessmen, including those of Cadbury, Leverhulme and Rowntree.

Having made his personal financial fortune and his name in Sheffield, Graves entered into the local political arena and stood as an Independent in 1896. Echoing his concerns over issues of social welfare, education, poverty and a disproportionate representation system,

¹ 'The Largest mail-Order Business in Britain: An Object Lesson of Up-to-date Enterprise', *Review of Reviews*, (November, 1903), pp. 531.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 534-535.

³ *The British Architect* (October 2, 1903), p. 252.

Graves won the seat and he sat on the council until the following term when he lost the next election. Undeterred he stood for election again in 1906 and apart from a brief spell between 1908 to 1916 when he left the local political scene to concentrate on his business, he remained politically active until his retirement in 1939.⁴ During this time he also sat on the local magistrate's bench, was awarded the freedom of the city, served as Lord Mayor in 1926 and in 1939 was awarded a honorary doctorate by the University of Sheffield.⁵ As councillor, orator and social thinker, the political platform gave Graves a viable opportunity to contribute and oversee a wealth of reforms, from the modernisation of Sheffield's urban fabric to programmes of social welfare, education and health. In addition to his political activities, Graves also immersed himself in a wide and diverse programme of philanthropy and the generosity he bestowed upon Sheffield remains a tangible legacy for both the city and its citizens into the twenty-first century.

Aim of the Thesis

Whilst Graves has received some recognition for his philanthropy, his contributions to business and consumer culture and his political role have received little attention, and less so from academia. It is the intention of this research, in some part, to rectify this omission. The thesis is constructed thematically through a series of seven chapters which aim to evaluate the firm's roots and business model, its progression and its relationship with British consumer culture. The final two chapters explore Graves' employee structure, his engagement with programmes of business welfarism and his activities on the civic platform. Structuring the thesis in this format allows it to develop methodically and permits each chapter to engage with specific areas of historical enquiry while avoiding repetition.

Both the primary and secondary sources have been chosen to evaluate the themes of the chapters, expand on current arguments and highlight Graves' contributions to British retailing, consumer activity and Sheffield's civic arena. Unfortunately for this period of study, evidence of business records such as account books, staff registers, productivity reports and minutes from board meetings are no longer available, therefore the thesis has

⁴ Janet Barnes, 'J. G. Graves: Sheffield Businessman, Art Collector and Benefactor: 50th Anniversary of the Graves Art Gallery' (Celebratory Catalogue), pp. 49-53. B.Grav: SST. Sheffield Local Studies Library, hereafter known as SLSL.

⁵ *Ibid.*

been unable to present statistics and figures based on business records. As such, the firm's business structure, profits and progression has been analysed through a range of alternative sources, including the *Sheffield Directories* which provide a portfolio of the firm's premises and their uses.⁶ Other sources include images, articles, artists' impressions and editorials selected from the firm's catalogues and other supplementary marketing material produced by the company. These include testimonials and advertisements contained in the classified sections of newspapers, journals and magazines such as *The Ladies Companion*, *The Puritan Temperance Companion*, *Police Review*, *Pullman's Weekly*, *The Review of Reviews* and the *Goldsmiths Journal*.⁷ Other primary evidence exploring the growth and popularity of large-scale mail order includes material from the American companies, Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward and the British companies, Kay's and Empire stores.⁸ Graves' business model and its relationship to consumer culture are also explored alongside the views of contemporary social commentators, Thorstein Veblen, Georg Simmel and Samuel Smiles.⁹ Similarly the business welfare initiatives of Graves are compared and contrasted with those of Rowntree, Cadbury and Leverhulme.¹⁰

While this use of primary evidence has allowed the thesis to contribute to the wider historical debates concerning retailing, consumer practices and business welfare initiatives, it has also proved useful in the examination of Graves' civic activities. Evidence in the form of campaign speeches highlight Graves' determination to engage with the social and welfare

⁶ Sheffield Directories: *Slater's* (1881, 1887); *White's* (1891, 1902); J. G. Graves' Mail Order Catalogues, boxes 1-4, 659.133 SSTF. SLSL

⁷ *The Ladies Companion* (February 25, 1899); *The Puritan Temperance Companion* (September 23, 1899); *Police Review* (October 7, 1900); *Pullman's Weekly* (May 5, 1903); *Review of Review* (February, 1903, August, 1903, November, 1903); *Goldsmiths Journal* (January, 1941), Vol. 43.

⁸ Sears Roebuck Catalogue, (1897); Montgomery Ward Catalogue (1895); Letters of William Kilbourne Kay: 'Instruction to Travellers' (September 27, 1907), 970.5:720/BA5946/3. Worcester Archives, hereafter known as W. A. Letter from W. K. Kay to Travellers (January 20, 1909), 970.51:720/5946/2 Entry No: viii. W. A. Letter to Travellers from W. K. Kay (May 6, 1912), 3.970.51/BA5946/3, W.A. 'Instructions for Training Agents' Letter from W. K. Kay (December 24, 1912) 3.970.51:720/BA5946/3, W.A. Business documents of Kay's Mail Order Company. 970.51:720/5946/2. Entry: 10, W.A.

⁹ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York, 1899); T. Veblen, *Conspicuous Consumption: Unproductive Consumption of Goods is Honourable*, (Re-published in Penguin Classics, 2005); Georg Simmel quoted in Alan Swingewood, *A Short History of Sociological Thought* (London, 2000), p. 102; Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory* (Harlow, 2006), p. 124; Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (1859) re-printed in Oxford World Classics (Oxford, 2002).

¹⁰ Joseph Rowntree quoted in Robert Fitzgerald, *Rowntrees and the Marketing Revolution, 1862-1969* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 231; Ian Campbell-Bradley, *Enlightened Entrepreneurs* (London, 1987) p. 147; William J. Ashley & Edward Cadbury, *Experiments in Industrial Organisations* (London, 1912); Port Sunlight Staff Newsletters, 'Progress' vol. VI: 65 (February, 1905), p. 44. Port Sunlight Archives, hereafter known as PSA.

needs of Sheffield and Council Minute Books have demonstrated the breadth of his council activities.¹¹ Similarly, the examination of Graves' philanthropy has been expanded upon through reports in newspapers, journals and Graves' own memoirs written in the 1940s.¹² Contributing to the analysis of Graves' business and civic activities, the secondary evidence engages with a wide selection of disciplines ranging from business and economic historians, marketing theorists and local historians to linguists, advertising analysts, socio-cultural historians and media sociologists. By using this wide selection of primary and secondary sources the chapters are able to develop a critical awareness and analytical depth in their subject areas. While much of the primary evidence of J. G. Graves has previously undergone little academic scrutiny and the secondary literature has lacked any significant reference to Graves' activities, it is hoped that this thesis will go on to generate further historical enquiry about this Sheffield businessman and prominent civic figure.

Synopsis of Chapters and Key Literature

Chapter one explores the roots of British Mail Order and compares its growth and development with its American counterparts. It considers the activities of American entrepreneurs, Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward and contrasts their business background and experiences with those of J. G. Graves and his British contemporaries, Kay of Worcester and the Fattorinis of Bradford. While the comparison demonstrates the similarities of the entrepreneurs' retailing backgrounds and their grasp of the mail order initiative, it also allows the chapter to explore the arguments of Braithwaite, Dobbs and Neal who suggested that Britain's topography and demography negated the successful establishment of the mail order enterprise.¹³ In addition, the chapter observes the suggestion by Rittenberg that locality, accessibility and the close proximity of amenities for the British consumer would also constrain mail order's ability to grow.¹⁴ To expand on this area of analysis, the chapter engages with the research of Coopey, O'Connell and Porter who suggest that by the 1970s, British mail order was a popular activity attracting a wide

¹¹ *Council Minutes Books* (1898-1899), *Year Book of Information* (1899 & 1906). Newspaper Cuttings, vol. 4, 942.74S. SLSL.

¹² J. G. Graves, 'Some Memories' (Sheffield, circa, 1943), 63.189: G785SST. SLSL.

¹³ Dorothea Braithwaite & S. P. Dobbs, *The Distribution of Consumer Goods* (London, 1932); Lawrence E. Neal, *Retailing and the Public* (London, 1932).

¹⁴ Max Rittenberg, *Direct Mail and Mail Order: Principles and Practice* (London, 1931)

audience of consumers.¹⁵ By considering the arguments generated between the 1930s and 2006, the chapter is able to evaluate the business initiative of Graves and the environment he was operating in. It also allows the chapter to demonstrate that Graves understood the relationship between his business model, the provision of an efficient transport network, programmes of urban modernisation and changing consumer demands. In this respect, the chapter argues that Graves demonstrated the Schumpeterian qualities of a successful entrepreneur.¹⁶ Closely tied to these arguments, the chapter goes on to explore how and why Graves sought to promote a programme of patriotic consumption and how that programme interconnected with debates over Free Trade and Protectionism. Adding to this area of analysis the chapter examines the contradictory business initiatives employed by Graves in his efforts to meet consumer demands and maintain business profits. Through the use of primary evidence, the chapter demonstrates that the firm was not without its business dilemmas and controversies and while Graves was heralded as the 'saviour of the English manufactured pocket watch', he also traded with the Massachusetts based Waltham Watch Company in America.¹⁷

The final part of the chapter explores Graves' dispute with the British Post Office during the early 1900s and highlights the depth and degree of Graves' protestations and their impact upon Sheffield. Through primary evidence it examines how Graves and his actions were reflected in Parliament, the debates they raised and the national attention the dispute generated for this Sheffield businessman.¹⁸ The chapter also goes on to argue that Graves' victory over the Post Office played a significant role in the modernisation of the British postal service.

Chapter two focusses on how the firm of Graves attempted to attract and maintain the attention of British consumers and compete with city centres stores. Noting the evidence of Adburgham and Hey and their examination of a modernising city centre retailing

¹⁵ Richard Coopey, Sean O'Connell and Dillwyn Porter, *Mail Order Retailing in Britain: A Social and Business History* (Oxford, 2006).

¹⁶ Joseph Schumpeter, quoted in Bruce A. McDaniel, *Entrepreneurship and Innovation: An Economic Approach* (London, 2002), pp. 57-141.

¹⁷ *The Review of Reviews* (November, 1903), pp. 531-542. 4863M, SLSL; Sales pamphlet for pocket watches produced by J. G. Graves (circa, 1897-8), J. G. Graves, Receipts & Adverts, 1897-8. 658.872 SSTQ, SLSL.

¹⁸ 'Private Postal Collections-Sheffield Case', House of Commons Debate (28 February, 1901), vol. 90: cc. 56-57; 'Private Postal Collections-Sheffield Case', House of Commons Debate, (26th March, 1901), vol. 91: c.1366; *Daily Mail* (26 February, 1901); *Telegraph Chronicle* (26th April, 1901); *Our Home* (18 May, 1901).

programme, the chapter explores how the firm sought to compensate for the loss of the shop worker and the haptic experience while simultaneously seeking to entice consumer interest and loyalty.¹⁹ It also considers Schlereth's suggestion that American catalogues represented a 'department store between book covers' and Onufrijchuk argument that the early American catalogues failed to embrace a modernising theme.²⁰ However, this chapter will suggest that the Sheffield firm selectively borrowed from the American format and produced catalogues that were both enticing and suited to meet the needs of a British audience of consumers.

The second part of chapter two evaluates the role of the mail order agent. Comparing and contrasting the different initiatives employed by Graves, the Fattorinis and Kay in their use of agents, the chapter observes the criticism levied at the Sheffield firm by its Worcester competitor, William Kilbourne Kay.²¹ It also explores how the firms differed in their recruitment and use of agents, the incentives they offered and the demands they placed upon their recruits. Considering the economic and social benefits of agency work from the perspective of the agents' own rewards, the chapter also engages with Benson's study of penny capitalism.²² It discusses the agents' work as both a means to augment income and as a socio-cultural activity and explores if the activities of the mail order agent shared any similarities with the penny capitalists. It also questions if the work and role of agents had a capacity to stimulate a concept of class consciousness and encourage programmes of social mobility. The final part of this analysis focusses upon the agents and their roles in the community. Evaluating the argument of Boorstin who suggests that twentieth century America witnessed the formation of consumption communities, which he argues, were stimulated through shared identities, neighbourhood familiarity and social cohesion, the chapter explores if Boorstin's analysis could be applied to the activities of British mail order and its use of agents.²³ While Boorstin does not consider the role of the mail order agent or

¹⁹ Alison Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping, 1800-1914*. (London, 1964). David Hey. *A History of Sheffield* (Lancaster, 2010).

²⁰ Thomas Schlereth in R. Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 3; Roman Onufrijchuk, 'Origins of the Consumer Culture,' in William Leiss, Stephen Kline & Sut Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising: Person, Products and Images of Well-Being* (London, 1990), p. 78.

²¹ Letters from William Kilbourne Kay to Travellers (September 27, 1907), 3.970.51720/BA5946/3 and (January 20, 1909), 970.51:720/5946/2. Entry No. viii. Worcester Archives.

²² John Benson, *The Penny Capitalists: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Entrepreneurs*, (New Jersey, 1983).

²³ Daniel Boorstin in W. Leiss, S. Kline & S. Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising*, p.59.

British concerns, his observations of consumption communities is relevant to this aspect of research. As the chapter will argue, while the agents benefitted from their supplementary income and consumers from the familiarity of the agents, the mail order enterprises relied upon their representatives to stimulate the development of consumption communities. In essence these tri-partite forces were fruitful for the agent, the consumer and the firms.

Captivating and securing the loyalty of consumers is the theme of chapter three. It begins by exploring the firm's programme of credit and acknowledges the comments of Coopey et al who suggest that Graves' credit programme played a pivotal role in the popularisation of credit across the mail order sector.²⁴ It also notes the arguments of Johnson, Taylor and O'Connell's research concerning the social and moral complexities associated with credit and discusses how the firm of Graves attempted to address these complex issues.²⁵ Through the use of primary evidence, the analysis observes how the firm marketed its credit programme, who its target audience was and how it attempted to marry its programme of credit to the concepts of respectability and responsibility.²⁶ The chapter also discusses the firm's gendered approach to its credit programme. Within this area of analysis the chapter observes the arguments of Lemire, Pujol and Bodkin who suggest that credit was seen as a 'distinctively male prerogative' and those of Roberts and Chinn who note that the home's financial management often remained the responsibility of the housewife.²⁷ Acknowledging these secondary arguments alongside the primary evidence of Graves' firm reveals the complexity of credit, its social and gendered connotations and its implications for consumers seeking to avoid debt while looking to better their lifestyles. In addition, both sources demonstrate how and why mail order firms such as J. G. Graves viewed the

²⁴ R. Coopey et al, *Mail Order Retailing in Britain: A Business and Social History* (Oxford, 2006), p. 19.

²⁵ Avram Taylor in R. Coopey et al., *Ibid.*, p. 77. See also: A. Taylor, *Working Class Credit and Community since 1918* (Basingstoke, 2002); Paul Johnson in Sean O'Connell, *Credit, Community and working-Class Debt in the UK since 1880* (Oxford, 2009); Paul Johnson 'Credit and thrift and the British working class: 1870-1939' in: Jay Winter (ed.), *The Working Class in Modern British History* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 147-170.

²⁶ *Review of Reviews* (November 1903), p. 535.

²⁷ Beverly Lemire, Ruth Pearson & Gail Campbell (ed.), *Women and Credit: Researching the Past, Refiguring the Future* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 4-12. See also: Michele A. Pujol, *Feminism and Anti-Feminism in Early Economic Thought* (Aldershot, 1992); Ronald G. Bodkin, 'Economic Thought: Adam Smith, Harriet Taylor Mill and J. S. Mill,' *Feminist Economics*, 5: 1 (1999) pp. 45-60; Elizabeth Roberts quoted in John Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain, 1880-1980* (London, 1994), p. 23. Carl Chinn in J. Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain*, p. 100. See also Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940* (Blackwell, 1984).

provision of credit as a business necessity and why the consumption of credit was as forcibly marketed as the firm's commodities.

The second part of chapter three explores how the firm used its marketing material to convey popular ideologies, values, sentiments, constructed identities and concepts of Britishness. Through the primary evidence of the firm's advertising material and the contributions of Marxist theorist, Raymond Williams, media sociologist John Sinclair, social critic, Vance Packard, and advertising analysts, William Leiss, Stephen Kline and Sut Jhally, the chapter evaluates how the firm sought to connect commodity with consumer.²⁸ It explores how the firm used hooks, codes and triggers to sell its commodities and how the use of such advertising tools had the capacity to connect concept with commodity and commodity with consumer. Suggesting that the marketing material acted as a medium of communication, the chapter considers the firm's capacity to promote the practices of respectability and responsibility along with a Smilesean programme of self-help and self-betterment. The analysis concludes by suggesting that the firm attempted to promote the consumption of the tangible commodity alongside the consumption of the intangible concept, sentiment, value and ideology.

The final part of chapter three considers the firm's relationship with the growth of suburbia. It examines how the company attempted to augment its profits, its profile and its customer numbers by targeting the suburban household and how, through its advertising material, it reflected a romanticised portrayal of the suburban lifestyle. It also considers how the firm contributed to the growth of a suburban concept through its sale of fashions and what may be termed as fripperies. Included in this analysis are the contributions of Oliver, who argues that for some the suburban lifestyle presented new and exciting opportunities and Cohen's suggestion that suburbia not only narrowed the class divide but also encouraged programmes of self-gratification and spending.²⁹ The chapter also acknowledges the observations of Benson who not only notes the rise in real incomes during the early-mid twentieth century but also suggests that savvy retailers often honed in on these urban and

²⁸ R. Williams in John Sinclair, *Images Incorporated: Advertising as Industry and Ideology* (Kent, 1987); Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (London, 1979). W. Leiss, S. Kline & S. Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising*.

²⁹ Paul Oliver, 'Great Expectations: Suburban Values and the Role of the Media', in Paul Oliver, Ian Davis & Ian Bentley, *Dunroamin: The Suburban Semi and Its Enemies* (London, 1981); p.125; Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions* (London, 2006), p. 101.

suburban areas of consumer activity.³⁰ As the chapter will demonstrate, the Sheffield firm not only recognised the marketing viability of these consumers, but socially and culturally acclimatised and constructed its marketing material to attract their attention.

Chapter four continues to evaluate the interconnectedness between concepts and commodities by focussing on issues of gender. Initially exploring the sale of domestic commodities, the chapter examines how the sale of these items attracted a gendered advertising narrative. Assessing the narrative alongside the secondary evidence of Giles' examination of early twentieth century domestic modernity, Nava's discussion of domesticity, women and advancing technology and Bignell's analysis of constructed advertising discourse, the chapter argues that while the firm attempted to sell modern appliances, those sales remained tied to a gendered discourse.³¹ Furthermore, the firm's advertising rhetoric often retained a conservative approach in relation to women, their domestic roles and their occupation of the private sphere.

Continuing with the theme of gender, the chapter goes on to explore how the firm represented men and women through its sales of clothing and fashions, how it used labels and titles to connote concepts of sophistication and respectability and how it engineered its marketing rhetoric to suit a changing climate of fashions, desires and wants. Engaging with the arguments and contributions of socio-cultural historians and advertising analysts, including Ugolini, Greenfield et al, Valverde, Sinclair and Leiss, Kline and Jhally, the chapter goes on to develop the argument that Graves contributed to a gendered and class oriented ideology through its marketing discourse.³² In addition, through primary evidence and the secondary arguments of Ugolini, the chapter demonstrates that the firm of J. G. Graves was

³⁰ Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society*, pp. 13 & 44.

³¹ Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* (Oxford, 2004), p. 20; Mica Nava, 'Modernity's Disavowal: The Women, The City and The Department Store' in Pasi Falk & Colin Campbell (ed.), *The Shopping Experience* (London, 1997), p. 64; Jonathan Bignell, *Media Semiotics: An Introduction* (Manchester, 1997), pp. 16-17.

³² Laura Ugolini, 'Men, Masculinities and Menswear Advertising, c. 1890-1914,' in John Benson & Laura Ugolini, (ed.), *A Nation of Shopkeepers: Five Centuries of British Retailing* (London, 2003); Jill Greenfield, Sean O'Connell & Chris Read, 'Gender, Consumer Culture and the Middle-Class Male, 1918-39' in Alan Kidd & David Nichols (ed.), *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle Class Identity in Britain, 1800-1940* (Manchester, 1999), p.187; Mariana Valverde, 'The Love of Finery: Fashion and the Fallen Woman in Nineteenth Century Social Discourse', *Victorian Studies* 32 (2) Winter 1989; John Sinclair, *Images Incorporated: Advertising Industry and Ideology* (Kent, 1987), p. 46. W. Leiss, S. Kline & S. Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising*.

ideally placed to accommodate the changing demands of consumers and particularly those of lower middle class men seeking to dress well on a small budget.³³

The aim of chapter five is to explore Graves as an ambassador for empire. It evaluates how he used his marketing medium to promote the British Empire and how that medium gave him a national platform to air his own views. It also discusses the firm's establishment of its own foreign and colonial department and its determination to secure the custom of British subjects living and working in the colonies and dominions. Within this area of analysis the chapter considers Graves' authoritative stance in relation to British trade, how that stance was aligned to concepts of Britishness, superiority and control and how the pervasive threads of a jingoistic narrative infiltrated the firm's advertising discourse. The final part of the chapter explores how the firm's commodities and their sales narratives were intrinsically aligned to matters of empire, how they had the capacity to promote an imperial ideology, and how some commodities were culturally divisive by reinforcing concepts of race, cultural difference and separate identities. Underpinning these arguments are the contributions of Falk and Campbell and their analysis of advertising's ability to convey constructed and romanticised images of the colonies, Williamson, Bignell and O'Barr's arguments on the construction of meaning through advertising rhetoric and Ramamurthy's detailed evaluation of the power of advertising to portray and reinforce concepts of difference.³⁴

The aim of chapter six is to explore Graves as an employer and advocate of business welfare reform. Beginning with an evaluation of gender in the workplace, the chapter focusses upon the firm's white blouse sector, including women's roles, status and employment opportunities. Arguing that the firm of Graves relied upon a female workforce, the analysis considers the research of Steinbach who suggests that the early twentieth century witnessed a significant rise in white blouse employment.³⁵ While acknowledging that the firm of J. G. Graves would have contributed to this sector of growth, the chapter also

³³ Laura Ugolini, 'Men, Masculinities and Menswear Advertising, 1890-1914', in John Benson & Laura Ugolini, (ed.), *A Nation of Shopkeepers: Five Centuries of British Retailing* (London, 2003).

³⁴ Pasi Falk & Colin Campbell, *The Shopping Experience* (London, 1997); Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London, 1995); Jonathan Bignell, *Media Semiotics: An Introduction* (Manchester, 1997); William, M. O'Barr, *Culture and the Advertisement: Exploring Otherness in the world of Advertising* (Oxford, 1994); Anandi Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising* (Manchester, 2003).

³⁵ Susie Steinbach, *Women in England, 1760-1914: A Social History* (London, 2005), pp. 35-37.

observes the arguments of Johnson who suggests that while the white blouse sector opened up a new avenue of employment for women, their prospects and opportunities within the workplace remained limited.³⁶ As the chapter will demonstrate, while the firm of J. G. Graves significantly contributed to the growth of the white blouse sector in Sheffield, the primary evidence also substantiates the claims of Johnson, with men clearly appearing to dominate the higher ranking positions.

Following on from this, the chapter goes on to examine Graves' programme of business welfare. Comparing and contrasting his programme with those of Leverhulme, Rowntree and Cadbury, it demonstrates that Graves' approach to issues of business welfare shared many similarities with his business contemporaries. The analysis of Graves' pension scheme has been explored alongside parliamentary debates, the contemporary comments of social welfare advocates, reports on the issue of pensioner poverty, staff newsletters from Port Sunlight and evidence from Cadbury and Rowntree.³⁷ Key authors contributing to this area of analysis includes Hennock's research on the complexity of pension provision, Johnson's examination of the debates between the Individualists who advocated self-help and the Collectivists who called for state intervention and Grigg's study on the politics of pension reform.³⁸ By engaging with these primary and secondary sources, the examination has highlighted the significance of Graves' pension scheme, both in relation to issues of pensioner poverty and in matters of business welfare and productivity. It has also been able to give Graves' pension scheme the accreditation it deserves and cement that accreditation within the history of British business welfare initiatives.

The final part of chapter six focusses upon the company's construction of a modern and centralised office complex. Examining the location and design of the building, the chapter

³⁶ Paul Johnson (ed.), *20th Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (London, 1994), p. 98.

³⁷ 'The Old Age Pensions Bill (1908) and After' *Westminster Review* September 1908, p. 334; 'Old Age Pensions, A Bill to provide pensions for the aged poor (18 & 20 June, 1901); Old Age Pensions; A Bill (5 February, 1904); The Old Age Pensions Act (15 October, 1908); Old Age Pensions Amendment Bill (9 February, 1911). William J. Ashley & Edward Cadbury, *Experiments in Industrial Organisations* (London, 1912), p. 167. B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty, a Study of Town Life* (London, 1901); Port Sunlight: Employees Newsletters: 'Progress' (October 1899), vol. 1 (1), Port Sunlight Village Trust Collection, hereafter known as PSVTC. 'Progress' (December 1899), vol. 1 (3), PSVTC; 'Progress' (May 1900), vol. 1 (8), PSVTC. 'Progress' (December 1900), vol. 1 (15), PSVTC. 'Progress' (February 1905), vol. VI (65). PSVTC.

³⁸ E. P. Hennock, 'Poverty and Social Reform' in Paul Johnson (ed.), *20th Century Britain*, pp. 80-82; Paul Johnson, 'Self-Help versus State Help: Old Age Pensions and Personal Saving in Great Britain, 1906-1937', *Exploration in Economic History* 21 (1984), pp. 329-350; John Grigg, *Lloyd George, The People's Champion*, pp. 158-159.

discusses how its practical and aesthetic elements were both business orientated and bore an allegiance to modern business welfare practices. It also explores if this healthier working environment signalled an affiliation with the pursuit of good working practices while simultaneously advocating the wider adoption of respectability and responsibility both inside and outside of the firm's gates. Within this area of analysis the chapter explores the company's social agenda and discusses if a varied programme of social activities, including choral and literary groups, rambling associations, sewing classes, girls' guilds and sporting affiliations complimented a co-operative and inclusive working environment. Adding to this analysis are the arguments of Fitzgerald and Beaven who argue that employers understood the dual benefits of business welfare programmes in terms of a healthy workforce and productivity and Joyce who suggests that modernising welfare programmes still carried an ethos of employer paternalism.³⁹ Considering these secondary arguments alongside the primary evidence of Graves, Leverhulme, Rowntree and Cadbury's welfare programmes, the chapter highlights both the complexity of these early business welfare initiatives and their controversies.

The final chapter of this thesis explores Graves' activities in the local political arena and his role as philanthropist. It discusses the social, cultural and political environment of Sheffield where Graves forged his business and examines how this environment, his rise in business and his accumulation of economic wealth shaped his identity. Beginning with a historic overview of Sheffield, the chapter notes how Sheffield was perceived by outsiders, observes its political and social climate and analyses those issues alongside Graves' political campaign speeches and his activities as an elected councillor. Through the primary evidence of Council minute books and newspaper reports, it explores Graves' capacity as a councillor to oversee programmes of welfare and social reform, propose improvements to Sheffield's sanitation and housing policies, petition for a review of the education system and make calls for fairer political representation.⁴⁰ Giving focus to these areas of enquiry are the contributions of

³⁹ Robert Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and the Marketing Revolution, 1862-1969* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 219; Brad Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men in Britain, 1850-1945* (Manchester, 2005), p. 9.

³⁹ Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in later Victorian England* (London, 1980), p. 137.

⁴⁰ *Council Minutes Book*, (1898-99), pp. 14-15 and p. 161. *Year Book of Information* (1899), p. 62. Improvement Committee: *Council Minutes*, (1898), p. 272 and *Council Minutes* (1898-1899), pp. 12-18. Finance Committee: *Year Book of Information*, (1906), p. 62. Graves campaign speech at Walkley Church School (1896) Nether

Burnett's analysis on the social history of housing and at a local level, Hey's study of social housing in Sheffield. These secondary arguments are also complimented by Harman and Harper's study of Sheffield's architecture.⁴¹ Considering Graves' move onto the civic platform, the chapter also engages with the work of Twells who suggests that the early nineteenth century witnessed a turning tide of influential civic presence, which she argues, were a group of middle class civic elites who while 'grounded in moral righteousness [carried] a sense of involvement in a progressive movement'.⁴² As the chapter will demonstrate, Twell's analysis helps to place Graves' entrance into the civic arena as neither unpredictable nor unusual.

The final part of chapter seven explores Graves' philanthropic activities and considers how his move into philanthropy bore similarities with his political entrance. Discussing the development of Graves' philanthropic agenda, the chapter again engages with the argument of Twells and also those of Jordan and Adam and their examinations of English philanthropy.⁴³ It explores the range of Graves' philanthropic programme and acknowledges his contributions in the provision of educational facilities, gifts of social housing, facilities for children and donations to appeals and charities. Furthermore it acknowledges Graves' financial support for the city's hospitals and particularly his financial contribution that paved the way for research into radiography and led to the establishment of Sheffield's Western Park Hospital; now a national centre of excellence for the treatment and palliative care of cancer patients.

The chapter also recognises Graves' contributions in the areas of preservation and conservation, the provision of recreational parkland and gifts related to the arts and Sheffield's cultural scene. Discussing how these acts of benevolence were socially and

Hallam election papers, 6452M, SLSL. Graves campaign speech at Gleadless Road Board School (1896) J. G. Graves election papers, 6452M, SLSL.

⁴¹ John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1815-1985* (London, 1986); David Hey, *A History of Sheffield* (Lancaster, 2010); Ruth Harman & Roger Harper, 'The Architecture of Sheffield,' *The History of the City of Sheffield, 1843-1993* (ed), V II: Society (Sheffield, 1993); Wilbur K. Jordan, 'The English Background of Modern Philanthropy,' in *The American Historical Review*, 66 (2) January, 1961; David Owen, *English Philanthropy, 1660-1960* (London, 1964); John Stevenson, 'The Countryside, Planning and Civil Society in Britain, 1926-1947' in Jose Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British history: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford, 2005).

⁴² Alison Twells, *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle Class, 1792-1850* (Basingstoke, 2009), p. 63.

⁴³ Twells, *Ibid*; Wilbur K. Jordan, 'The English Background of Modern Philanthropy,' in *The American Historical Review*, 66 (2) January, 1961; Thomas Adam, *Buying Respectability: Philanthropy and Urban Society in Transnational Perspective, 1840s to 1930s* (Indiana, 2009).

culturally attuned to encourage participation in healthy and rational recreation, the analysis explores the gifts alongside the arguments of Beaven who notes the relationship between religion, the temperance movement and the encouragement to pursue rational recreation.⁴⁴ Further contributions are made to this area of analysis through the work of Sennett and Gunn and their suggestions that the creation of recreational parklands acted as a city's 'lungs', which brought much needed relief from the heavily populated and urbanised environment.⁴⁵ As the chapter argues, while these gifts were intended to be socially inclusive and undoubtedly benefitted Sheffield and its citizens (and continue to do so) they also promoted messages of rational recreation and the adoption of respectable citizenship. The chapter concludes by recognising that Graves' affiliation with the city of Sheffield helped to shape his social values and in turn this incentivised his work in the field of local politics and in his programme of philanthropy.

⁴⁴ B. Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men in Britain*, p. 68.

⁴⁵ Simon Gunn, 'The Middle Class, Modernity and the Provincial City: Manchester, 1840-1880,' in Alan Kidd & David Nichols (ed.), *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle Class Identity in Britain, 1800-1940* (Manchester, 1999), p. 116; Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilisation* (London, 1994).

Chapter One

The Development of Mail Order: A Trans-Atlantic Perspective.

Richard Coopey et al argue that the 'the sale of goods to the public via mail order catalogue was an established feature of British retailing by the end of the nineteenth century'.¹ By the mid-1970s, the authors note 'seven out of ten households [had] been 'exposed to a mail order catalogue', and by the 1990s British consumers had become 'firmly entrenched' in the habit of purchasing commodities through this retailing activity.² However, while consumer outlets such as the department store, the co-operatives and the development of town centre arcades has attracted historical analysis and debate, Britain's mail order sector, with the exception of Coopey et al has received surprisingly little attention. In contrast, the history of American mail order has generated a great deal of attention, from economic and business historians as well as retailing analysts who have explored its longevity, advertising agendas and production of enticing sales literature. Yet as this chapter (and indeed this thesis) will argue, British mail order made a significant contribution to the changing landscape of the country's retailing sector and the evolution of British consumer culture. It is the intention of this chapter to explore the roots of this commercial enterprise in Britain, the differences and similarities between the British and American business models and the challenges Britain's mail order entrepreneurs encountered as they attempted to establish their businesses and popularise this retailing activity.

To undertake this critical analysis the chapter will begin by examining the activities of two early American mail order entrepreneurs, Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward, both of whom pioneered this type of retailing business and established successful yet competitive companies. As will be shown in the British case, they provided a model for the British entrepreneurs to adapt to suit the British market. It will consider the external environment that contributed to the American's success, their business initiatives, advertising agendas, manufacturing and outsourcing methods and their programmes involving both agency and direct customer sales. It is through this examination of American companies that the chapter can develop a critical and comparative analysis in relation to the development of

¹ R. Coopey, S. O'Connell & D. Porter, *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 1.

² *Ibid.*

British mail order and particularly the pioneering activities of three British entrepreneurs, William Kilbourne Kay of Worcester, the Fattorinis of Bradford and J. G. Graves of Sheffield. It will consider the entrepreneurs' similarities regarding their retailing backgrounds and experience, along with their ability to adopt and adapt the American model to accommodate the needs of British consumers. It will engage with the arguments of business and marketing analysts and particularly the suggestion that Britain's urban landscape presented an unfavourable environment for British mail order to flourish, which suggests some, led to a slimmed down affair compared to their American counterparts.

The final part of the chapter will focus upon one of Britain's earliest mail order pioneers, J. G. Graves of Sheffield. It will explore the roots of his business model, the methods he employed to promote his retailing programme and his willingness to adapt his business strategy in order to maintain company profits and a consumer audience. The chapter will also explore Graves' confrontation with Britain's Post Office, the impact of the dispute in Sheffield, the debates it generated in the House of Commons and the support and allegiance Graves encountered from other parties. It will also consider the dispute's final outcome, the implications for other British businesses and consumers and its relationship to both modernising British businesses and the evolvement of British consumer culture. The chapter will finish with a brief overview of Graves' early success, the plethora of establishments his firm occupied across Sheffield city centre and wider afield and its ability to offer a range of employment opportunities to Sheffield's working and lower middle classes.

The Birth of American Mail Order

The advent of the large mail order enterprise in America was instigated by two entrepreneurs who, whilst acting separately, saw the potential in this new type of mass commercial activity. The large American landscape provided a fruitful environment for the entrepreneurs who saw that the remote homesteaders, prairie dwellers and farmers lacked the convenience of larger urban shopping facilities. While such isolation had already prompted the establishment of a range of innovative agendas, such as the formation of communal shopping groups, it was these groups that would become the first target audience for the fledgling mail order entrepreneur, Montgomery Ward. During the early 1800s, many rural dwellers had begun to establish a series of purchasing clubs, specifically

organised to pool resources and gain a degree of control over commercial concern.³ By the 1860s, a much larger rural organisation, 'The Grange Patrons of Husbandry' was developed. Its aim was two-fold, firstly to secure better consumer amenities through the developments of co-operatives and secondly, to campaign for better regulation of the railways and the establishment of rural free mail delivery.⁴ In addition, these co-operatives also provided access to a wider range of commodities through the establishment of communal purchasing clubs. This early practice of social consumerism not only brought individuals and communities together but also increased their choices and allowed them to develop a pricing tariff in favour of their own pockets. Their practices were further enhanced through the growing practice of mass production which had been particularly stimulated through the American Civil War in 1861 and its need to mass produce firearms.⁵ However, mass production's early relationship to the purchasing clubs revolved around the supply of farming equipment and essential household items. The availability in quantity attracted the attention of the rural dwellers, the purchasing clubs and travelling salesman, Montgomery Ward, who had begun to establish contacts with farmers, prairie dwellers and the Grange clubs. In 1872, the fledgling businessman produced a single sheet list of 163 commodities and forwarded them to a selection of farmers' co-operatives in America's rural mid-west. His intention was not only to offer the goods at reasonable prices, but also to offer the convenience of a direct delivery service to the customers' nearest railway station.⁶ The new mail order programme of retailing was initially met with scepticism, particularly as the farmers, already accustomed to searching in the newspapers and sending away for goods 'more cheaply' and still exerting a degree of 'control' over their purchases, were wary of

³ David Blanke, *Sowing the American Dream: How Consumer Culture Took Root in the Rural Midwest* (Ohio, 2000); See also, Susan Matt, Review of David Blanke's, 'Sowing the American Dream,' *Journal of Social History*, (1) Vol. 36, (Autumn 2002), pp. 181-182 & Jane Adams *American Historical Review*, (1) Vol. 107 (January, 2002), pp. 209-210.

⁴ Further information on the Grange Patrons of Husbandry can be found in Blanke, *Sowing the American Dream*, pp. 161-185; William D. Barns, 'Oliver Hudson Kelley and the Genesis of the Grange: A Reappraisal', *Agricultural History*, (3) Vol. 41 (July, 1967), pp. 229-242.

⁵ For information upon mass production, its history and relevance to the American civil war see: Richard A. Gabriel & Karen S. Metz, *A Short History of War: The Evolution of Warfare and Weapons*, Chapter 5, 'The Emergence of Modern War.' Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College. Online version USAF War College; <https://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/gabrmetz/gabr0000>. Accessed August 2015.

⁶ 'Montgomery Ward's First Catalogue,' Chicago Tribune, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/politics/chicagodays-firstcatalog-story,0,3067002.story>. Accessed August 2015. See also preface of Montgomery Ward & Co. *Catalogue and Buyers Guide* (1895).

Ward's new commercial venture.⁷ Their scepticism was further inflamed by the negative rhetoric in the American press. In 1873, the *Chicago Tribune* advised caution over this practice of mail order trading and suggested that Montgomery Ward, as the head of this type of commercial activity, was a 'swindler' and a 'deadbeat'.⁸ This new practice of trading, suggests Blanke 'was so unconventional that even experienced urban consumers [were initially] blind to its potential'.⁹ Maintaining his confidence and ability to offer variety, convenience and competitive prices, Montgomery Ward pressed forward and the Granges' trust grew more secure and Ward's sales and trading methods began to grow in popularity. The *Chicago Tribune* eventually retracted its defamatory statement and issuing an apology stated its initial conclusions of Ward and his programme of trading had been 'grossly unjust and not warranted by real facts'.¹⁰

Ward established himself as a main mail order supplier to many of the Grange co-operatives and this successful retailer/consumer relationship led the businessman to rapidly extend his retailing agenda to include urban as well as rural consumers. From the printing of a single sheet of advertising material in 1872, Ward had by 1882 successfully established his company producing full catalogues of 238 pages; by the turn of the century this had increased to over 1,000 pages.¹¹ Ward's ultimate endorsement of his retailing success came from the former president Teddy Roosevelt. Travelling around Africa, Roosevelt witnessed that a group of missionaries stationed at the mouth of the River Nile were not only well clothed and enjoyed comfortable homes but that their needs and desires were met by the mail order firm of Montgomery Ward.¹² While for Roosevelt, such global trade appealed to his 'dream of imperial cultural hegemony', for the programme of mail order it was a demonstration of its business capacity and scope.¹³ Limiting this retailing and consumer activity to the needs of rural farmers and prairie dwellers was becoming increasingly inconsistent with mail order's capabilities. As this thesis will go on to demonstrate, British entrepreneur J. G. Graves also recognised the scale and scope of such business operations

⁷ Blanke, *Sowing the American Dream*, p.185.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 186-187.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

and embraced an opportunity to trade on a global and indeed an imperial stage.¹⁴ As Blanke argues, it was the rapid growth and popularity of Montgomery Ward's company which 'came to represent twentieth century American enterprise and opportunity at its best'.¹⁵

A further American entrepreneur and mail order opportunist was Richard Sears. Sears' introduction into mail order was forged in a similar way to his British counterparts through the sale of pocket watches. In 1886, while working as a railway agent for the Minneapolis and St Louis Railway in North Redwood, Minnesota, Sears received an unwanted cargo of pocket watches. The sender, not wishing to pay for their return, sold the commodities to Sears, who in turn sold them to colleagues and friends.¹⁶ Having realised this initially small yet lucrative retailing potential, Sears continued to purchase further supplies of the pocket watches which, as Emmet and Jeuck suggest, not only carried a practical element but also a symbol of urban sophistication.¹⁷ Having realised a small profit, Sears enrolled the help of other station agents who were offered a small commission on sales. The pocket watches, sent subject to a period of examination, grew in popularity around the railway workers' networks and their sales finally secured for Sears an income which enabled him to leave his employment at the railway and establish his own small watch retailing business.¹⁸ In the early winter of 1887, Sears began to advertise the watches for sale in newspapers with 'an appeal to the common man'.¹⁹ He also secured agents and supplied the pocket watches on a deferred payment scheme with one third of the payment in cash and the remainder 'in promissory notes payable in instalments'.²⁰ The newly established 'R. W. Sears Watch Company' with its agents, deferred payment scheme and ability to associate the pocket watches with a concept of sophisticated urban ownership, had by 1887 re-located to Chicago. Chicago, state Emmet and Jeuck, provided Sears with a 'rail network [able] to facilitate [a] speedy and less costly service [of delivery] to the whole country'.²¹ The speed of a delivery service and his determination to increase his capacity of sales was growing increasingly important to Sears' retailing ambition. Having invested heavily in a series of

¹⁴ For discussion of Graves' overseas marketing initiative, see chapter on Empire and Imperialism.

¹⁵ Blanke, *Sowing the American Dream*, p. 186.

¹⁶ Boris Emmet & John E. Jeuck, *Catalogues and Counters: A History of Sears, Roebuck and Company* (Chicago, 1950), P. 25.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

newspaper advertising campaigns, issued warranties and guarantees and offered inspection periods to customers before making a commitment to buy, Sears formed a partnership with experienced watchmaker, Alvah C. Roebuck. Sears also heard of competitors establishing watch clubs (where men could pay a dollar a week and receive their watch upon a lottery draw) established his own modified version.²² With Roebuck's knowledge of the watch trade and Sears' growing knowledge of profit margins, advertising and sales rhetoric, the firm amassed a profit margin that allowed them to sell at low prices, purchase large amounts of stock from bankrupt watch companies and swallow up discontinued lines for the Waltham watch company.²³

The mail order business was, for Richard Sears, an enterprise that required a management eye for detail and the constant need for innovation. According to Asher and Heal, Sears often repeated his concerns that "the mail order pot never has and never will boil without a red hot fire all the time."²⁴ It had to be 'constantly dramatised and exploited with electrifying schemes'.²⁵ Dramatising and exploiting involved moving into alternative goods, widening the consumer audience to fulfil a range of desires, needs and wants, adopting an astute advertising campaign and maintaining low prices.²⁶ By extending its range of products to include sewing machines, bicycles, sporting goods, refrigerators, cooking stoves, general household ware, fashions and even some groceries, the company by 189 was reaching sales figures up to \$400,000.²⁷ Two years later it had almost doubled that figure to \$750,000.²⁸

The success of both Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward was generated through a series of interconnecting issues. While the recognition of rurality and the isolation of consumers prompted the actions of Ward, Sears and Roebuck's success was more opportunistic. However both companies recognised that changes to infrastructure, modernising retailing programmes and the wants and needs of consumers were also changing. As Sears recognised, it was gaining an understanding of the 'needs and desires' of the target

²² *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

²⁴ Louis E. Asher & Edith Heal, *Send No Money*, (Chicago, 1942), p. 10. See also Emmet & Jeuck, *Catalogues and Counters*, p. 32.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-45.

²⁷ <https://www.searsarchives.com/history/history1890s>. Accessed August 2015

²⁸ *Ibid.*

audience that was the key to their success.²⁹ Both retailing and consumer culture was modifying and modernising and while the external environment such as infrastructure and postal programmes aided such changes, they still needed innovative businessmen and business programmes to propel and effect those changes.³⁰ Such retailing entrepreneurs had recognised that their businesses need not be restricted to the service of rural communities but also held an attraction for city dwellers and the urban consumer. By 1895, Sears' company was producing catalogues containing a plethora of goods and by 1906 the firm was reported to have business premises covering more than three million square feet of office space.³¹ In 1905 Sears wrote to customers in Iowa offering free items such as stoves, sewing machines and bicycles if they successfully distributed the catalogues amongst friends and family and encouraged new sales.³²

The catalogues acted as a catalyst, with their tempting offers and range of products, all of which were conveniently delivered to the home or the nearest railway station of the customer. By 1947, the Grolier Club of New York included Ward's catalogue as one of the most influential books published before 1900.³³ Suggesting that mail order had not only 'had a profound influence on the economics of the continent', it also reported that the activity had 'perhaps been the greatest single influence to increase the standard of American middle class lives'.³⁴ The historian, Frank Presbrey sums up the popularity of this unique area of consumer growth: '...from the mail order beginnings in Augusta, Chicago and Boston grew a mail order catalogue [that] covered about every human or animal need, including a complete ready-made house in a variety of sizes and designs'.³⁵ Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward had popularised the activity of mail order shopping to a wide

²⁹ Quote taken from <https://www.searsarchives.com/history/history1890s>. Accessed August 2015.

³⁰ Between 1890 and 1920, three particular programmes impacted upon the success of the mail order companies, one of which was the introduction of rural free delivery in 1898. For further information see: Thomas J. Schlereth, 'Country Stores, County Fairs and Mail Order Catalogues: Consumption in Rural America,' in, Simon, J. Bronner (ed.), *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920* (London, 1989), pp. 339-375.

³¹ <https://www.searsarchives.com/history/history1900s>. Accessed August 2015.

³² <https://www.searsarchives.com/history/history1890s>. Accessed August 2015. See also Emmett and Jeuck. *Catalogues and Counters*, p. 93.

³³ The Grolier Club was a society for bibliophiles. See: Blanke. *Sowing the American Dream*, p. 186. Also, Montgomery Ward, collection no. 8008-87-01-30, box 45, folder "Catalogue History" American Heritage Centre, Laramie, Wyoming, USA.

³⁴ Comments from the Grolier Club re-produced in Blanke, *Sowing the American Dream*, p. 186.

³⁵ Frank Presbrey cited in Robert Brandon, 'The Origin and Development of Mail Order in the United Kingdom,' *The Journal of Advertising History* 6 (8) (London, 1984) p. 6.

audience of consumers, both rural and urban. They had demonstrated the entrepreneurial qualities later to be described by economist Joseph Schumpeter, who suggested that the entrepreneur's success lay in their ability to recognise and 'seize that opportunity, [to] create a new marketable contribution to the economy'.³⁶ Having recognised this marketing potential and its relationship to wider external factors, including programmes of mass production, they had forged ahead in their efforts to create a new and engaging business strategy and structure. The standardisation and mass production of commodities enabled them to achieve the scale and scope needed to develop an effective and profitable retailing company. Their employment of dedicated marketing teams and buyers had also, as Wilson observes, enabled firms such as mail order to 'gauge market trends'.³⁷ Indeed, Sears often referred to his buyers as his 'missionaries' whose duties were not only to attend exhibitions and fairs across America and in 'every civilised part of the world', but also to 'converse' with the public and 'discover their needs and desires'.³⁸ If supply could not meet demand, Sears would often invest in individual companies to increase the manufacturers output.³⁹ At other times, the mail order company would finance its own manufacturing corporations, producing popular commodities that ranged from stoves, cameras and horse drawn buggies to firearms, ploughs and plumbing equipment.⁴⁰ This manufacturing activity was one such area of the American mail order model that Graves of Sheffield, certainly during the firm's early retailing programme, would also employ.

Companies such as Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward engaged in the three-pronged investment strategy, 'production, distribution and management' which, according to Chandler, was a necessary business strategy in order to 'achieve the competitive advantages of scale, scope or both'.⁴¹ Chandler acknowledges the company of Sears Roebuck as forward thinking in its business approach and notes that the lines it carried in the early twentieth century exceeded the output of America's largest department and chain stores.⁴² The success of their operations enabled them to fulfil 100,000 daily orders, something that in

³⁶ Joseph Schumpeter, quoted in Bruce A. McDaniel, *Entrepreneurship and Innovation: An Economic Approach* (London, 2002), p. 57.

³⁷ John F. Wilson, *British Business History, 1720-1994* (Manchester, 1995), p. 64.

³⁸ Emmet & Jeuck, *Catalogues and Counters*, p. 121.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁴¹ Alfred D. Chandler, *Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 35.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

the pre-railroad days very few merchants would have achieved in a lifetime.⁴³ The era of mail order shopping had arrived, complete with hefty catalogues to whet the appetite, inform, educate, entice and persuade. Consumers unsure of the legitimacy of the companies could be reassured by persuasive sales rhetoric and, in the case of Sears Roebuck, influential testimonials from two leading banks, the Metropolitan National Bank and the National Bank of Illinois, which were re-printed in the first few pages of the catalogues.⁴⁴ In 1895, Montgomery Ward extolled the virtues of becoming a 'Ward's shopper' through a plethora of reassurances, including the guarantee of full refunds, customer testimonials and enticing narratives that suggested his commodities and business practices 'embrace[d] all that is desirable to induce everyone'.⁴⁵

The weighty catalogues, suggests Schlereth, 'represented a department store between book covers' and became so popular that they were affectionately referred to as the 'homesteader's bible'.⁴⁶ Offering a diverse and enticing range of commodities through a series of 'dazzling [advertising] manipulations' the companies aimed to secure the attention of their readers and the loyalty of their pockets and purses.⁴⁷ For Schlereth, not only did the catalogues promote sales of the commodity, but also 'doubled as a reader, a textbook and an encyclopaedia'.⁴⁸ He suggests that while children practiced their arithmetic and learned geography from the postal-zones, adults used them as almanacs as they read the 'catalogues features [of] inspirational readings, epigrams and poetry'.⁴⁹ While such portrayals conjure up idyllic images of the rural American family reading their Homesteader's Bible, the fundamental practices of mail order shopping aligned itself with a modernising American consumer. Whether rural or urban, such consumers had choice, competitive prices, convenience and in some cases deferred payment schemes to enjoy. As Blanke observes 'by the turn of the century the catalogue giants openly pandered to the needs of individual consumers without an apparent need to defer to communal

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Sears, Roebuck & Co. Catalogue*, 1897 (Reproduced, 2007, New York), p. 7.

⁴⁵ *Montgomery Ward and Company Mail Order Catalogue and Buyer's guide*, 1895. (Reproduced, 2008, New York), p. 349.

⁴⁶ Thomas Schlereth cited in Coopey et al., *Mail order Retailing in Britain*, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Blanke, *Sowing the American Dream*, p. 214.

⁴⁸ Schlereth, 'Consuming Visions', p. 365.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

sensibilities'.⁵⁰ The development and progression of American mail order was much more than a convenient way to shop, it was the introduction of a new consumer culture involving social consumerism, immediate gratification, credit and social networking. The catalogues, passed around family, friends, colleagues and associates augmented the establishment of consumer social networks. They also acted as a surrogate form of communication between retailer and consumer and filling the void of the missing shop counter clerk was achieved through the inclusion of features, advice columns, poetry, epigrams and household tips sandwiched in between the advertisements. However, this popular retailing and consumer activity did not remain the reserve of the American retailer or the American consumer. The large mail order house initiative became just as influential as it infiltrated its way into the British market and through the British consumers' letterboxes. Furthermore Britain's mail order entrepreneurs would share remarkable similarities with their American counterparts as they adopted and adapted their retailing agendas to suit a British audience of consumers.

Mail Order: A British Perspective

Coopey rightly argues that Ward and Roebuck's recognition of rural dwellers' lack of consumer facilities 'spearheaded [mail order's] expansion'.⁵¹ Britain's geographical landscape, even for those living in the remotest rural communities, shared little in common when compared to their American neighbours. It was these geographical and topographical differences that critics and analysts of Britain's mail order often honed in on. Writing in the pre-Second World War era, Braithwaite and Dobbs argued that both rail and road access provided the British consumer with easy access to retailing amenities, and as such negated the 'vogue' seen in America.⁵² Similarly, Rittenberg suggested that as most British consumers lived within six miles of a market town, British mail order did not have a basis for large scale existence.⁵³ This argument was expanded by Neal, who writing during the same period, suggested that British mail order would eventually decline, leaving it simply an 'adjunct to personal shopping'.⁵⁴ In the 1980s and 1990s such claims were further reiterated by scholars. Writing in 1984 Brandon argued that it was both the size of the American

⁵⁰ Blanke, *Sowing the American Dream*, p. 214.

⁵¹ Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 2.

⁵² Braithwaite & Dobbs, *The Distribution of Consumer Goods*, p. 200.

⁵³ Rittenberg, *Direct Mail and Mail Order*, p. 192.

⁵⁴ Neal, *Retailing and the Public*, p. 65.

population and its vast geographical expanse that provided a favourable environment for mail order to flourish and although Chandler did not make a study of British mail order, he did argue that Britain did not enjoy the same giant mail order business serving rural customers compared to that of America.⁵⁵ These arguments suggest that both the development and survival of Britain's mail order retailing was dependent upon a series of external and particularly geographical factors, the main issue of which was consumer isolation and rurality.

If compared to the size and scale of Sears and Montgomery Ward, then Chandler's suggestion that Britain failed to enjoy the giant mail order houses is essentially correct. However, while the size of the British enterprises were smaller, this does not suggest that issues such as Britain's topography, population density and consumer localities left Britain incompatible with the business of mail order. The size and scale of American mail order cannot be used as a comparative measure to evaluate the success, growth or popularity of its British counterparts. As pointed out by Coopey et al, while Rittenberg acknowledges the part rurality played in mail order's popularisation, he also acknowledged other contributory factors aiding mail order's growth, including competitive pricing, consumer convenience and the supply of products difficult to obtain elsewhere. It was these issues, suggested Rittenberg, which could provide the British mail order houses with a leading edge over other forms of retailing.⁵⁶

Similarly the arguments presented by Braithwaite and Dobbs also present a dichotomy. The convenience of an efficient and regular transport network taking consumers to nearby towns and cities could have prevented the attraction of home shopping. However and in contrast, the transport network itself became an integral part of mail order's success. As Michael points out 'innovations in transportation and communication led to the innovation in organisational form in retailing, known as the mail order house'.⁵⁷ Efficient delivery of commodities to the mail order warehouses depended upon the well-organised running of the railway network. Similarly, the quick turn-around of those commodities for despatch to customers depended upon the proficiency of the railways and postal services. Britain's

⁵⁵ Brandon, *The Origin and Development of Mail Order*, p. 6; Chandler, *Scale and Scope*, p. 256.

⁵⁶ Rittenberg's arguments noted by Coopey et al, *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Steven C. Michael, 'Competition in organisational form; mail order versus retail stores, 1910-1940.' *Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organisation*, 23 (1994), p. 269.

developing infrastructure and particularly its railway network was not just about the movement of people but also about the movement of stock. As such, despite the British consumer enjoying the advantages of easy access to towns and cities, that accessibility did not appear to present the British entrepreneurs with a dilemma nor negate their retailing success. With these contradictions in mind, the development and popularisation of British mail order has to be re-evaluated and re-considered alongside Britain's own unique geography, topography and consumer culture.

Three early British mail order entrepreneurs, John Graves of Sheffield, William Kilbourne Kay of Worcester and the Fattorini family of Bradford, all recognised the potential of British mail order. They also understood that Britain's infrastructure, topography, consumer activities and the modernisation of the urban and town landscapes provided a fruitful environment for mail order to flourish. All of the entrepreneurs had their retailing roots in the watch and jewellery business. Operating during the late Victorian period, they had also begun to recognise a growing relationship between consumption, convenience, need and desire. That relationship had its roots in the development of Britain's infrastructure and the growing modernisation of towns and cities. For historian Geoffrey Best, the development of the railway not only 'served everywhere that mattered,' but also signalled 'momentous change'.⁵⁸ They also offset a rise in urban growth, commuter travel and, for some, narrowed their experiences of isolation. In addition they contributed significantly to the efficient transportation of goods, much of which argues Best, helped to improve the living standard for the working classes.⁵⁹ For the mail order entrepreneurs, the railways played a significant role during their days of trading. As jewellers, the Fattorinis, Graves and Kilburn Kay were astute and knowledgeable about the sales of pocket watches. As in America, pocket watches were not only becoming a much sought after 'symbol of urban sophistication,' but were also becoming an important commodity for railway workers themselves.⁶⁰ Mass produced in America, the Massachusetts based Waltham watch factory, had already introduced a programme of centralisation and standardisation by 1854.⁶¹ Furthermore, following the death of nine railway workers in Ohio in 1891 (reportedly to be the fault of an

⁵⁸ Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851-75* (London, 1985), p. 88.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁶⁰ Emmet & Jeuck, *Catalogues and Counters*, p. 25.

⁶¹ <https://www.walthamwatchfactory.com/history>. Accessed August 2015.

engineer's watch) the railway companies issued all American railway masters with a new and reliable pocket watch.⁶² A similar programme was introduced in Britain and Sheffield's John Graves, the Bradford based Fattorinis and Worcester's William Kilbourne Kay became the main suppliers to the British rail network services.⁶³ The watches grew in appeal, not only as an item of adornment but as an essential commodity for the working and rising lower middle classes and the commuter whose work demanded punctuality and good timekeeping. As Beaver argues, Fattorini had recognised that a new industrialised society was making 'people far more time-conscious than they had ever been before'.⁶⁴ Not only were 'factory and office demand[ing] punctuality' but the 'railways were rapidly creating a commuter class'.⁶⁵

For astute retailer Fattorini, this modernising British society heralded the introduction of a new sales initiative: The 'Pocket Watch Club'.⁶⁶ As early as the mid-1850s Fattorini had begun to establish such clubs, the aim of which was to provide consumers without ready cash an opportunity to obtain a pocket watch.⁶⁷ At the same time, America's mass production of Waltham watches had also begun to flood the British market, an issue that Beaver notes, led to an 'enormous revolution in the price'.⁶⁸ Noting that 'whereas the hand crafted article cost several guineas, an accurate [and] reliable, factory-made Waltham watch complete with silver case could be bought retail for a little as a pound'.⁶⁹ Fattorini, aware of the growing popularity of the watches was also aware that one pound still represented a full week's wage for the average working man and to overcome this retailing dilemma, John Fattorini, along with his brothers, Edward, Innocent and Antonio had by the turn of the century established a series of company savings clubs across the country.⁷⁰ Often held in the

⁶² For information concerning the Ohio railway accident see: <http://postalmuseumblog.si.edu/2013/04/the-great-kipton-train-wreck.html>. Accessed, November 2014.

⁶³ John Graves was producing catalogues for railway watch supplies in the 1890s. For further information see: J. G. Graves, Receipts & Adverts, 1897-8. 658.872 SSTQ, SLSL. The Fattorinis boasted of their supply of pocket watches to engine drivers and guards across Britain's railway network. See; Patrick Beaver. *A Pedlar's legacy: The Origins and History of Empire Stores* (London, 1981), p. 44. William Kilburn Kay held a contract to supply clocks, watches and timepieces to the Great Western Railways, see <https://www.kaysheritage.org.uk>. Accessed August 2015.

⁶⁴ Beaver, *A Pedlar's Legacy*, p. 31.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

better class establishments of public houses and advertised as 'meetings', the clubs were systematically promoted through a series of leaflets, flyers and insertions in the local classified columns of local newspapers. Conducted within a formal atmosphere and overseen by an appointed secretary, a treasurer and a committee of seven members, the clubs were established upon strict guidelines with prospective members vetted and often requiring references.⁷¹ Selling the pocket watches through a system of self-financing credit (credit generated solely through the savings of the club members) each member would make at least a weekly contribution of 6d for a period of fifty weeks, at the end of which a ballot or raffle would determine the lucky recipient for that draw. The clubs, suggested the Fattorinis, were formed with two objectives; firstly to 'enable working people with little or no creditworthiness to buy watches and clocks', and secondly, the strict club rules ensured that the firm would not succumb to 'bad debt'.⁷² Run on a professionally structured business agenda, the clubs supplied each member with a list of rules which included fines for late payments, the need for surety by a respectable householder and details of his required weekly subscription.⁷³

Dominated by like-minded working class consumers, such clubs, whilst guided by formal rules, were not just seen as purchasing clubs but also as respectable social gatherings that provided an opportunity to purchase commodities normally out of their reach. For the Fattorinis this growing number of consumers, with their changing desires and demands, presented a new retailing opportunity and their establishment under formal rules ensured that little financial risk was afforded to their company. In addition, the clubs offered a new and respectable form of credit that also signalled a changing and modernising approach, one that was deliberately distanced from any recognition or association with organisations such as pawnbrokers, tallymen and shadowy money lenders.⁷⁴ The Fattorinis' early retailing experience, including the clubs and their establishment of a series of shops across Bradford, Harrogate and Skipton, led them into the activity of mail order. As they augmented their range of commodities to include bedding, rugs, footwear and clothing along with incentives

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁷³ Beaver notes the early clubs of the 1850s were aimed at working men seeking to purchase watches. By the 1890s the clubs also sold clocks, items of jewellery and musical instruments. It is unclear if women were permitted to join these later clubs. For full list of club rules see: Beaver, *A Pedlar's Legacy*, pp. 35-36.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

such as weekly payment terms and immediate delivery, the Fattorinis detached their mail order business from their established shops. By 1907 and trading under the name of the 'Northern Trading Company' the Fattorinis' mail order business was firmly established. Three years later the firm's application to incorporate Northern Trading Stores as a limited company was refused by the Registrar of Companies.⁷⁵ However the suggestion of an alternative name by the registrar was agreed and 'Empire Stores Limited' with a nominal share capital of £100 was registered as a trading company in June 1910.⁷⁶ The success and development of Empire Stores involved the recognition of a growing relationship between changes in Britain's infrastructure, urbanisation, the growth of the commuting classes and changes in the desires and wants consumers. In essence, the Fattorinis' initial retailing objectives; to promote its sales of pocket watches, coalesced nicely with an urbanising and growing society of consumers.

In similar fashion, Worcester's William Kilburn Kay also established his mail order firm on the back of pocket watch sales and associated time-pieces. Kay, like J. G. Graves had developed his knowledge of timepieces working for an established jeweller and watchmaker, John Martin Skarrat in Worcester.⁷⁷ By the mid-1880s Kay, having established his own jewellery business, was not only offering individual customers a catalogue to peruse but also employing travelling agents to sell his goods and promote his methods of trading.⁷⁸ By 1893, having enlarged his range of stock, Kay moved his business premises 'conveniently close' to Worcester's main railway line which provided the 'easy access' to grow his mail order concern.⁷⁹ In 1896, Kay amalgamated with his old employer Skarrat & Company and this gave him to the added benefit of retaining a previously held contract by Skarrat to supply clocks, watches and timepieces to The Great Western Railway. The contract not only provided a lucrative income but also served to circulate the name of Kay much wider afield, a bonus which no doubt, as Mills suggests 'enhanced the company's business reputation'.⁸⁰ As in America, clocks, watches and timepieces, along with Britain's expanding rail network

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p 53.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Bernard Mills, *Kay's Universal Stores: Kay's of Worcester, A Pictorial History of the Mail Order Company* (Worcester, 2003), p. 10.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-14. Kay's agents acted as salesmen and money collectors. Kay's early policy was that all items had to be paid in full before goods were despatched. For further discussion on the issue of agents and travellers see chapter two of this thesis.

⁷⁹ Mills, *Kays Universal Stores*, p. 15.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

appeared to play an integral role in the early business ventures of mail order. However the British entrepreneurs 'did not necessarily have to develop along the same lines as in the United States' and this was something, argues Coopey that the early 'entrepreneurs had grasped instinctively'.⁸¹ It was about engaging with British consumers, providing competitive prices, utilising good marketing techniques and providing an efficient and convenient delivery service. As Coopey notes, by the 1880s 'few [British] households were beyond the reach of a rapid and reliable delivery service'.⁸² Kay had certainly grasped this and by 1899 had widened his stock to incorporate the sale of fashions, musical instruments, sewing machines and a range of electro-plated goods.⁸³ Moving away from established shop sales appeared to hold an attraction for the jeweller and the watchmaker and the development of Graves' company took a similar root to that of his competitors.

"A Business turn of mind" – Sheffield Entrepreneur, John George Graves

Hilton argues that consumerism has shown its 'greatest potential as a movement for historical change when it has attached itself to a broad set of social democratic principles that coalesces with other interests in society'.⁸⁴ In similar fashion to the Fattorinis and Kilburn Kay, J. G. Graves of Sheffield had also recognised the potential marketing opportunities to be had by large scale mail order trading. However, his entrance into mail order, whilst like his contemporaries the Fattorinis and Kilburn Kay initially involved sales of pocket watches and small items of jewellery, offered a further consumer incentive: immediate gratification. John Graves entered into the business of mail order retailing in the late 1880s. Twenty years later his business had developed into a leading mail order company serving customers across Britain and the empire. In 1903 Graves' company led a substantial article in the 'Review of Reviews' with the title, 'The Largest Mail-Order Business in Britain: An object lesson of up-to date enterprise'.⁸⁵ With the firm firmly established in Sheffield it became one of the city's largest employers, reportedly providing opportunities for over 3000 of Sheffield's labouring population.⁸⁶ Graves' success propelled him onto both a local and national platform and his financial fortune secured both his own personal wealth

⁸¹ Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 3.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 17. See also Mills, *Kays Universal Stores*, pp. 17 & 21-22.

⁸⁴ Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in 20th Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 23.

⁸⁵ *The Review of Reviews* (November, 1903), pp. 531-542.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 534.

and enabled him to engage in a wide programme of philanthropy and civic activities. His business endeavours also enabled him to play an integral role within a changing programme of British consumer and retailing practices. Furthermore, his attempts to promote British manufacturing led him to be heralded as the saviour of the English manufactured pocket watch, at least for a time.⁸⁷ His fledgling business activities fitted neatly into Schumpeter's definition of what constituted a successful entrepreneurship. For Schumpeter, suggests business historian Bruce McDaniel, it was the entrepreneurs' ability to 'transfer the concept of innovation from the realm of speculative reasoning' and successfully produce a 'functional model of the capitalist process, [that] allow[ed] for both new firms and the rise of new men to business leadership'.⁸⁸ Graves had seized an opportunity and this led him to become not only a successful businessman but also take on the red tape of the British post-office and this would see his name echoed around parliamentary debates.

Graves was not a native of Sheffield. He was born in 1865 in the small Lincolnshire town of Horncastle, England, to Wesleyan Methodist parents, Thomas and Julia Augusta Graves.⁸⁹ His relatively comfortable formative years, spent in the rural Lincolnshire Wolds, centred upon church attendance, visiting local country fairs, listening to troupes of ballad singers and observing his father's business as a butcher.⁹⁰ In 1873, at the age of eight, Graves moved with his family to the small town of Heckmondwike, located at the edge of the Pennine hills, where he was enrolled as a pupil at Batley grammar school.⁹¹ His school days, Graves recalled, equipped him with a good grasp of 'history, Christian Evidences and elementary Euclid, [along with] a flair for languages, including, Latin, French, German and Italian'.⁹² It was also whilst at school that he began to develop a 'business turn of mind' and one that would provide him with the necessary 'equipment when he found [himself] a corner in the steel city'.⁹³ Upon leaving school at the age of fourteen, Graves undertook a seven year bound apprenticeship under the guidance of Sheffield watchmaker and jeweller,

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 531-533.

⁸⁸ McDaniel, *Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, p. 33.

⁸⁹ Birth, Marriage and Death Index, 1837-1915. District of Lincolnshire, Vol. 7a, p. 481.

⁹⁰ John George Graves. 'Some Memories' pp.3-5.

⁹¹ 'Looking Back: The Apprentice who became Sheffield's Greatest Benefactor', *Sheffield Newspaper Cuttings*. Vol. 25, p. 126. 942.74SF. SLSL.

⁹² Graves, 'Some Memories', pp. 9-10.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

W. Wichman.⁹⁴ Graves boarded and lodged with Wichman for the duration of his apprenticeship and his efforts earned him one shilling a week, which he recalled, his employer often forgot to give him (figure 1).⁹⁵

Graves' apprenticeship served two fundamental elements that would prepare him for his entrance into the world of business and indeed his later civic activities. Firstly, it introduced him to the small retail business of the watch and jewellery trade. Secondly, his wider learning environment, the heavily industrialised city of Sheffield, introduced him to the world of local politics and gave him a glimpse of the social deprivation and poverty experienced by some of Sheffield's working classes.



Figure 1. Graves stood far right serving his apprenticeship. Circa 1886. Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library, J. G. Graves 'Some memories', G785SST.

For Graves, Sheffield was a '...smoky, gloomy place whose people were deprived of the joys of nature and open air'.⁹⁶ Indeed, following the end of his apprenticeship, Graves himself would personally experience a period of poverty. 'Determined not to look for a job as an employee' he registered himself as a 'Watchmaker' and rented a small shop at 3, Howard Street, Sheffield.⁹⁷ The small upper room with a rental charge of half-a-crown a week provided him with the basics to begin his fledgling retailing career. By 1888, Graves moved to new premises in Sheffield at 6-8 Furnival Street and advertised his services as J. G. Graves, Practical Watchmaker.⁹⁸ While the double numbering of the premises gave an exaggerated appearance of size, Graves used this to his advantage and ensured that both

⁹⁴ Wichman was registered as a watchmaker and jeweller living and residing at 165 Gibraltar Street, Sheffield. (1881 Sheffield Census) Public Record Office. Ref. RG11/4644. p. 2. A bound apprenticeship was a contract between employer and apprentice. It usually involved a set payment paid by the apprentice's father or guardian to the employer. The contract ensured a set period of training generally between five and seven years. Figure 1: J. G. Graves, 'Some Memories', p. 12. Photograph copyright of 'Some Memories' by J. G. Graves, reproduced courtesy, SLSL.

⁹⁵ 'Looking Back', p. 25.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* See also: *Slater's Directory of Sheffield* (1887), p. 81. SLSL; *The Review of Reviews*, (November, 1903), p. 533.

⁹⁸ *Slater's Directory* (1881), p. 231. See also: 'Looking Back', p. 126.

numbers appeared on his correspondence. This 'shrewd turn,' noted the *Review of Reviews*, heralded the 'promise of [an] advertising ability of no mean order'.⁹⁹ That advertising ability would later form the backbone of Graves' large and profitable mail order company. By December 1888, an advertisement placed in the *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* and the *Sheffield Star* shows that Graves had moved premises again and was occupying a shop at 25, New Surrey Street.¹⁰⁰ It was also during this time that he obtained a pedlar's licence and began to canvass the nearby districts of Derbyshire, Lincolnshire and Nottingham to sell his small accumulation of wares.¹⁰¹ For John Graves, the act of peddling, which he acknowledged 'differed little from [the practices] of his ancestors' was also an experience he reportedly embraced. Viewing it as both productive and instructive, he acknowledged that peddling had made him 'many friends, [and] gain[ed] [him] valuable [retailing] experience'.¹⁰² However, Graves' early programme of small shop sales, sporadic advertising and itinerant trading failed to reap the financial rewards he sought. Neither was he operating on a par with his competitors such as the Fattorinis and their expanding programme of Watch clubs. In addition, Graves' early preference for selling the English manufactured pocket watch created difficulties with supply. Foreign imports flooding the domestic market created anxiety for English watch manufacturers as well as amongst retailers who needed to secure a profit.

While English manufactured watches were still being heralded for their artisan design, their intricacy and their cultural value, their sales faced an uphill struggle. Foreign imports, free trade, calls for protectionism and disputes facing traditional English watch manufacturers raged amongst manufacturers, retailers and politicians. In 1881, the House of Commons debated the second reading of a bill concerning the cost of British patents and argued that their costs were not only too high for entrepreneurs but were also impacting upon the modernisation of English watch manufacturing.¹⁰³ While some manufacturers acknowledged the need for patenting reforms, there was also a suggestion that there existed 'a latent suspicion that the working men's organisations were not in favour of machinery in the place

⁹⁹ *The Review of Reviews*, (November, 1903), p.534.

¹⁰⁰ *Evening Telegraph and Star* (December 31st 1888) and *Sheffield Daily Times* (January 9th 1889) No. 496. Classified Advertisement Section. SLSL. See also: *Whites Directory* (1891), p. 452. SLSL. 'Looking back', p. 126.

¹⁰¹ *The Review of Reviews*, (November, 1903), pp. 533-534.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ House of Commons Debate, 15th June, 1881, vol. 262 cc.570-613.

of manual power'.¹⁰⁴ This politicised and Luddite atmosphere of suspicion created a dichotomy for the English watch trade and for retailers wishing to supply English watches to domestic consumers. Such arguments over free trade, foreign imports and the suggestion that there was a great need to 'stimulate [English] mechanics and invent labour-saving machines [as a] matter of national importance,' continued unabated during the late nineteenth century.¹⁰⁵ In addition, the debates over traditional manufacturing methods (with their artisan and intricate designs) and the reluctance to modernise also highlighted the inconsistencies of consumer patterns and the social divisions between consumer needs and consumer desires. Noting the relationship between manufacturing, pricing, production rates, wages and employment, the House echoed its concerns that the focus leaned more towards the provision of 'luxuries of the rich; not the necessities of the poor'.¹⁰⁶ The debates' interesting arguments were all symptomatic of an era where consumer wants and needs were changing, evidenced by the rise of watch clubs, railway contracts seeking supplies and the efforts of those wishing to modernise production methods. While a modernising infrastructure and transport network stimulated a growth of the commuter class who themselves sought the ownership of the pocket watch, the traditional and artisan manufacturers struggled to accept the need to modernise. Ownership of a pocket watch had previously been the reserve of the middle and upper classes and a matter of pride for its artisan designers and the commodity's owner. Its mass production had the real potential to widen the market to working class men. If the evidence of Emmet and Jeuck is correct the market expansion occurred when the commodity began to associate itself with the meanings and symbols of urban sophistication. Graves, the Fattorinis and Kilburn Kay recognised and understood this changing pattern of consumer desire and their introduction of programmes to meet demand confirms the arguments of Hilton, that 'consumerism has shown its greatest potential as a movement for historical change' when it 'coalesces with other interests in society'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ House of Commons Debate, 15th May, 1884, vol. 288, cc.473-8.

¹⁰⁷ Hilton, *Consumerism in 20th Century Britain*, p. 23.

The suggestion in 1886 that the ‘American and Swiss watch trade [was] utterly ruining [Britain’s] own’ finally stimulated the desire to find a solution.¹⁰⁸ In 1890 and under the guidance of Lord Derby, the President of the Board of Trade, new watch factories were established in Prescott, Coventry and Birmingham, their remit to centralise and standardise watch production.¹⁰⁹ Finally, the adoption of new technology and its modernising programme of production secured the quantity of English watches that John Graves sought in order to secure his early retailing programme. Offering the sale of the watches through a payment instalment plan and advertising them through the classified advertisements of newspapers and journals, Graves began to establish his fledgling mail order business. In one of his earliest attempts to attract a wider audience, Graves placed an advertisement in the journal, *Christian World*.¹¹⁰ Offering ‘a lot of value for a little money,’ the advertisement reaped its reward when Graves received an order for two English Lever watches from Australia.¹¹¹ It was this order, Graves recalled, that stimulated his faith in the advertising method and he began to place further advertisements in an array of newspapers and periodicals.¹¹² Systematically lowering the price of the English Lever watch from £3.10s to 3 guineas, then £2.10s to 50s popularised the name of Graves within the retailing market.¹¹³ Furthermore, the reduced costs of the English lever watch came with a series of other consumer incentives, including a delivery service, inspection period, payment via instalments with no added interest (often referred to by Graves as a ‘protective system of supply’) and generous seven year warranty.¹¹⁴ In addition, and unlike Fattorini’s watch clubs and Kays’ demands for full payment, Graves’ customers had the added bonus of immediate gratification. Payable through ten monthly instalments of five shillings, Graves’ business model began to attract a wide audience of consumers. Graves, who ‘trusted the wage-

¹⁰⁸ House of Commons debate, 14th May, 1886. Vol. 305, cc1045-113. (It appears that Swiss watch manufacturers had evolved and modernised their processes during the previous five years and were now also posing a threat to Britain’s watch manufacturers).

¹⁰⁹ For a detailed history of the Lancashire Watch Company, including references to the firm of J. G. Graves, see: John, G. Platt, *Lancashire Watch Company, History and Watches* (Chester, 2016).

¹¹⁰ The exact date of this advertisement is unclear but it appears to have been placed in the 1890s, see: Graves, *Some Memories*, p. 31.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Review of Reviews, (November, 1903), p. 532.

¹¹⁴ The term, ‘Protective System of Supply’ can be found in many of Graves’ classified advertisements.

earning classes' focussed his attention on providing an affordable service to this sector of consumers and his retailing model cut through the social divisions of consumer practices.¹¹⁵

Graves' advertising did not stop at practical consumer incentives but also incorporated a series of politicised messages. Aimed at rousing and stimulating practices of patriotic



Figure 2. J. G. Graves Receipts and Adverts 1897-8 Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library, 658.872SSTQ.



Figure 3. North Devon Journal Courtesy of The British Library.



Figure 4. J. G. Graves Receipts and Adverts 1897-8 Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library, 658.872SSTQ.

consumption, Graves interconnected his advertisements with contemporary political debates, including issues of free trade, foreign imports and British manufacturing (figures 2-4).¹¹⁶

To simulate and whet the appetite of potential consumers, Graves' low-priced watches not only signalled their availability to those on lower incomes but the advertising rhetoric set out to appeal to the patriotic and ideological sentiments of British consumers. With advertisements containing suggestive imagery and carrying warnings about foreign competition, the rhetoric warned consumers about the dangers of 'buying a pig in a poke', the foibles of not ensuring their purchase was 100 per cent English or British manufactured and the suggestion that the British workman deserved only the best quality merchandise.¹¹⁷

They appeared in the national press, local newspapers and journals, including the *Daily Mail*, *Lloyds Weekly*, *Hull's Daily Mail*, *Manchester Evening Courier*, *The Cornishman*, *The*

¹¹⁵ Graves, 'Some Memories', p. 31.

¹¹⁶ Figure 2. J. G. Graves: Receipts & Adverts, 1897-1898. 658.872 SSTQ SLSL. Figure 3. *North Devon Journal*, 4th April, 1901, p. 7. Figure 4. *Baner Ac Amserau* (February 1st, 1899), p. 15.

¹¹⁷ The term Pig in a Poke appeared in several newspapers, for example see: *The Newcastle Courant* (February 18th 1899), p. 7.

Aberdeen Journal and the *Essex Newsman*.¹¹⁸ Graves advertised his English watches, complete with persuasive sales rhetoric and sentimentalised headlines and his attempts to allure consumers involved attaching a series of meanings and messages to his products. With images of British adventurers, the military, police officers and lifeboat guards all portrayed within the advertisements, a constructed Britishness; stoic, authoritarian, adventurous and unyielding married the commodity to a menu of social and politicised meanings, messages and constructed identities.¹¹⁹ This often sentimentalised attachment would often reappear throughout Graves' advertising narratives. Such practices, as Bignell suggests, not only allowed for the 'endowment of products with a certain social significance,' but also [aided them to] function as 'indexical signs,' able to connote a series of ideological values.¹²⁰ Graves' retailing learning curve had coalesced nicely with the current political debacles over foreign trade, the debates over modernising British manufacturing techniques and the nuances attached to social consumer activities.¹²¹ As Chandler observes, retailing institutions have often evolved in response to and as the result of the characteristics of their own national markets.¹²² Graves appealed to the patriotic consumer, the working class consumer and a growing number of rising lower middle classes whose wages had been slowly increasing from 1875.¹²³ Such consumers, Benson suggests, caught the attention of retailing entrepreneurs who increasingly began to concentrate their efforts upon the growing number of urban and suburban consumers.¹²⁴ These consumers had certainly become a target audience for Graves and Benson's further suggestion that retailers had to be 'equally, if not more resourceful if they were to persuade the working class consumer to invest in the less essential' was something that Graves had certainly

¹¹⁸ *Daily Mail* (December 18th 1905), p. 7; *Lloyd's Weekly* (April 2nd 1899) p. 16; *Hull's Daily Mail* (November 8th 1905) p. 8; *Manchester Evening Courier* (November 8th 1905), p. 3; *The Cornishman* (November 16th 1903), p. 2; *Aberdeen Journal* (June 21st 1899), p. 11; *Essex Newsman* (April 18th, 1899), p. 1.

¹¹⁹ Adventurers: *The Manchester Courier*, (November 1st, 1905) p. 3; Police Force: *Daily Mail* (November 8th 1905) p. 8; Lifeboat guards: *The Western Times* (November 1st, 1905) page number illegible.

¹²⁰ Jonathan Bignell, *Media Semiotics* (Manchester, 1997), p. 38.

¹²¹ For a discussion on the politics of free trade, commerce and civil society see Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation* (Oxford, 2012).

¹²² Chandler, *Scale and Scope*, pp. 256-260.

¹²³ Mason notes a rise in real wages occurred between 1875-1900 but observes the spending patterns of these consumers' remains circumspect. See: Tony Mason, 'Sport and Recreation,' in Paul Johnson (eds.), *20th Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (London, 1994), p. 111. For further information on the debates of the rise of real incomes, inflation and earnings by economists, Charles H. Feinstein and Arthur L. Bowley see: Peter Wardley, 'Edwardian Britain: Empire, Income and Political Discontent,' in *20th Century Britain*, pp. 57-78.

¹²⁴ John Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society*, p. 44.

understood and put into practice.¹²⁵ This was a period, notes Jefferys, that not only signalled a retailing revolution, but also one that ‘manifested [itself] in new techniques of selling, new methods of wholesale and retail organisations, new trades and new forms of retailing units.’¹²⁶ For Wilson, these new retailing units that ‘cast their nets across the highly integrated urban network’ included the co-operative societies and the multiple stores; however such nets were also being cast by the ventures of mail order entrepreneurs such as J. G. Graves.¹²⁷ In 1903, Lord Rosebery suggested that it was the efforts of J. G. Graves ‘who [had] saved the watch trade for England at a time when that industry was almost beaten out of the field by the American invader’.¹²⁸ Such acclamation could only have been realised by Graves’ intent to stimulate the market and integrate a menu of politics, economics and a changing social landscape into his retailing practices. This was a period, argues Trentmann that witnessed a definitive ‘interlacing of citizenship and consumption’.¹²⁹ Such interlacing, which had an ability to ‘translate material needs into larger social, moral and political concerns’, proved to be an opportunistic time for entrepreneurs such as J. G. Graves.¹³⁰

J. G. Graves: Politics, Patriotism and Profits

Despite such acclamation as that echoed by Lord Rosebery and the evidence of patriotically infused advertising, Graves was still a businessman looking to secure a profitable return and establish a successful business. His desire to secure a large and direct programme of sales to a sector of railway workers was evidenced in a letter sent to Graves from the journal, *The Railway Review* in 1897. Written in response to an enquiry made by Graves about the cost of advertising, the journal not only gave Graves the price of £240 for 52 insertions of full and half pages, but also informed him that its weekly copies of 36,000 enjoyed a net circulation of over 32,000 subscribers.¹³¹ Graves was casting his net widely and recognised that his early business model need not be reserved for small time advertising or local publications. Alongside advertisements placed in journals and newspapers during 1897-1898 he also

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹²⁶ James, B. Jefferys, in Wilson, *British Business History*, p. 96. See also: J. B. Jeffreys, *Retail Trading in Britain, 1850-1950* (Cambridge, 1954).

¹²⁷ Wilson, *British Business History*, p. 96.

¹²⁸ Review of Reviews, (November, 1903), p. 531.

¹²⁹ Frank Trentmann, ‘Bread, Milk and Democracy: Consumption and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Britain,’ in Martin Daunt & Matthew Hilton (ed.), *The Politics of Consumption: Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America* (Oxford, 2001), p. 133.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-134.

¹³¹ Letter from Railway Review. J. G. Graves, Receipts & Adverts, 1897-8. 658.872 SSTQ. SLSL.

produced his own sizable sales pamphlet during.¹³² However, the pamphlet aimed particularly at the commuter and the growing sector of railway workers was controversial. Having recognised that his need for stock could not be met solely by British manufacturers, Graves began advertising the sale of American watches. Furthermore the pamphlet extolled the manufacturing excellences and capabilities of the Massachusetts based Waltham factory! Heralding Waltham's productivity rates and its scientific advancements and suggesting that the watches held a globally 'unchallenged superiority' was in direct contrast to Graves' advocacy of British manufactured time-pieces. Any loyalty to the British trade appeared to have been deferred in favour of American manufacturers who could meet his business needs. His intention to popularise his mail order firm had resulted in a realisation that his business turn of mind could not always adopt a patriotic moral high ground when it came to the matters of supply and demand.



Figure 5. Marketing literature of J. G. Graves (circa 1897), Receipts and Adverts 1897-8. Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. 658.872SSTQ.

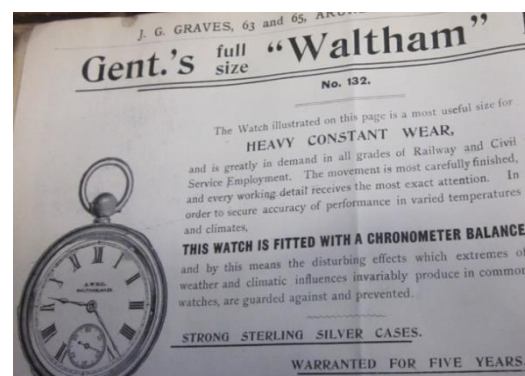


Figure 6. Marketing literature of J. G. Graves (circa 1897), Receipts and Adverts 1897-8. Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. 658.872SSTQ.

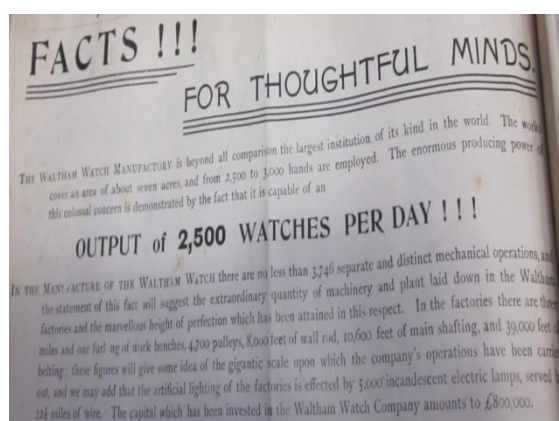


Figure 7. Marketing literature of J. G. Graves (circa 1897), Receipts and Adverts 1897-8. Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. 658.872SSTQ.



Figure 8. Marketing literature of J. G. Graves (circa 1897), Receipts and Adverts 1897-8. Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. 658.872SSTQ.

¹³² Figures 5-8, J. G. Graves pocket watch sales pamphlet (circa 1897-8), J. G. Graves, Receipts & Adverts, 1897-8.

Graves' advertising and business strategy was both diverse and intriguing. While in one context the businessman engaged in critical rhetoric, attacked foreign imports, placed Britishness and/or Englishness at the centre of his advertisements and appealed to patriotic consumer sentiments, he also understood the dangers of putting all of his eggs into one basket. He grasped a marketing opportunity that was being created by changing consumer desires, demands and wants. By the late 1890s Graves' company had adopted the title *Supply Warehouse of the World* and was trading with a national audience of consumers.¹³³ With its range of products and customer numbers increasing, the efficiency of the firm's turnover relied heavily upon the co-operation of the post office. However the demands placed upon the Post-Office led to a long and protracted dispute, gave the Post Master General a significant dilemma and initiated a series of parliamentary debates concerning Graves' method of retailing. It also instigated the beginnings of a revised postal service that not only affected other British business concerns but also generated a wealth of local and national publicity for both Graves and the city of Sheffield.

J. G. Graves and the Post Office Dispute

By the early 1900s, the company of J. G. Graves was regularly producing and distributing an estimated 400,000 catalogues per month.¹³⁴ The popularisation of this new consumer activity was intrinsically reliant upon the efficient transportation and delivery of its goods. While not specifically designed with mail order in mind, the inter-related roles of the Post Office and the railways played an integral part in the popularisation and success of this consumer activity. The introduction of the parcel post service of 1883, developed through close negotiations with the railways, along with the development of the parcel post international deliveries service of 1885, broadened the scope of this retailing activity.¹³⁵ This efficient programme of a delivery service, along with the introduction of the Postal Order in 1881 which provided a popular payment method for many mail order customers, formed

¹³³ This title appeared on a wealth of Graves' advertising literature, from the firm's own catalogues to subheadings and footnotes placed in the classified advertisements of newspapers and journals.

¹³⁴ *Review of Reviews*, (November, 1903), p. 537.

¹³⁵ Martin J. Daunt, *Royal Mail: The Post Office since 1840* (London, 1985), pp. 56-81. For foreign and colonial parcel post information see, Joseph C. Hemmeon, *The History of the British Post Office* (Oxford, 1912), pp. 63-88.

the vital arteries necessary to sustain the activity and productivity of mail order companies.¹³⁶

Graves had begun to rely heavily upon the Post Office's parcel and packet collection service and the introduction of its inland parcel service in August 1883, as local historian Mike Firth notes 'proven to be a great boon for emerging firms such as J. G. Graves'.¹³⁷ However, this service, which until 1898 had made provisions to collect packets and parcels from the firm's despatch depots, was subsequently revised by the Post Office, which resulted in additional costs for the firm of Graves, leading Graves to display his frustration in the public arena and take his cause to the House of Commons.¹³⁸ In 1900, frustrated by the Post office's refusal to reinstate its collection service and collect parcels of a postal value of less than five pence, Graves had begun to highlight his plight by sending large numbers of his firm's clerks to the Post Office to make single transactions. Rallying his workforce in militant style, the *Yorkshire Telegraph and Star* reported that Graves had sent upwards of 20 cabs, each of which carried two or three clerks armed with sacks of postal packets requiring registering, to the main Post Office building in Sheffield's town centre.¹³⁹ The cabs travelled in slow procession from Graves' offices at West Street, which were 'adorned with a variety of placards' and bore such phrases as 'Grant proper facilities for Sheffield trade, J. G. Graves down with red tape' and 'why should Sheffield wait?'.¹⁴⁰ The *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent* also covered the processions noting that 'gentlemen with their paste, pots and posters were quickly at work on the vehicles' and very quickly 'every cab [and] coach bore inscriptions [which were] decidedly to the point'.¹⁴¹ Such inscriptions included 'going back to old times - ye olde mail coach' and 'J. G. Graves Postal Packet delivery [service]'.¹⁴² The vehicles were supplied by local cab service, Collis of Broomhill, who was obviously supportive of Graves' plight, as were a great deal of the public, whose cheers upon the procession arriving at the post office

¹³⁶ Coopey suggests that over 80 million postal orders in small denominations were being issued annually by the end of the century. See: Coopey et al, *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 15. For further reading on the history of Postal Orders see, Dauntton, *Royal Mail*, p. 89.

¹³⁷ Mike Firth, 'Greatest Sheffielder?' in Mike Firth & John Firminger, *My Kind of Town*, Issue, 28 (Sheffield, 2018), p. 20.

¹³⁸ *Goldsmiths Journal* (January, 1941), p. 162. Vol. 43, MP.2231M, SLSL.

¹³⁹ *Yorkshire Telegraph and Star* (22nd November, 1900).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *The Sheffield and Rotherham Independent* (24th November, 1900), p. 8.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

made any 'discordant hoots from disapprovers unnoticeable in the roar'.¹⁴³ Graves had timed his actions to create the biggest impact. Arriving just before 6pm, the registration of the 2000 parcels and letters were not completed until almost 8pm.¹⁴⁴ Graves' militant style had seriously interrupted business and required the direct intervention of the Postmaster.¹⁴⁵ His refusal to concede to the post office's revised programme continued into the following year.¹⁴⁶

In February 1901, and with little resolution in sight, the *Daily Mail* reported that Graves had again exerted his frustration with the British postal system as the 'enterprising dealer in hardware [had] planned [a] retaliation of the most dreadful kind and executed it'.¹⁴⁷ The report noted that Graves, having sent 'in procession two hundred clerks, each [carrying] 120 pence, to the Sheffield post-office [to] purchase [individual] penny stamps', had once again created chaos as the 'cohort of imperturbable young men continued remorselessly' with their transactions.¹⁴⁸ For over two hours, the report suggested, the business of the Post Office was again interrupted and only ended when the Post Master 'hoisted the white flag and a day's truce' was agreed'.¹⁴⁹ Graves' actions had now attracted the attention of the national press and the *Daily Mail's* article married the businessman's name and his attempts to restructure the Post Office's programme to the efforts of well-known postal reformer John Henniker Heaton. Henniker Heaton, a conservative MP, had petitioned tirelessly for the introduction of the Penny Post, which he viewed as both a moral and social obligation to aid communication across Britain and the Empire.¹⁵⁰ Challenging Henniker Heaton to follow Graves' style of action, The *Mail* suggested that any future rebuttals Henniker Heaton may experience with the Post Office should be met by 'hiring a brigade of men to beset the General Post Office...the mere threat of which should make St Martin's-le-Grand quail'.¹⁵¹ The article, concluding with the suggestion that the Post Office should 'think a little more

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Yorkshire Telegraph and Star.*

¹⁴⁶ *The Sheffield and Rotherham Independent.*

¹⁴⁷ *Daily Mail* (26th February, 1901).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Henniker Heaton petitioned for the introduction of a cheaper means of mail communication for people across Great Britain and the Empire. For a social and business history of Henniker Heaton and his campaign for Post Office reform see: Frank Staff, *The Penny Post, 1680-1918* (London, 1993).

¹⁵¹ St Martin's-le-Grand was the site of the General Post Office headquarters in London.

about the convenience of the public and a little less about fetters and red-tape,' suggested that such activity was essentially the root and 'moral of the Sheffield hostilities'.¹⁵²

The refusal by the Post Office to enlarge its collection service and agree to collect parcels of a postal value of less than five pence also attracted the attention of Labour politician, Keir Hardie. In a House of Commons debate on the 28th February 1901, Hardie raised the issue with the representative of the Postmaster General, the Secretary to the Treasury.¹⁵³ Hardie's request that the Post Office accedes to Graves' request and accommodates the company's growing demands, was given some assurance by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, Austen Chamberlain.¹⁵⁴ Chamberlain, whilst acknowledging Graves' company already enjoyed exceptional facilities, also felt it important that the Post Master General reconsider 'under prescribed conditions' the recent changes it had made to its collection policy.¹⁵⁵ This suggestion to reconsider was given further impetus when Conservative MP, Sir Howard Vincent brought to the attention of the House the impact the dispute was having upon both the Post Office and the general public of Sheffield.¹⁵⁶ Bringing some clarity to the situation, Sir Howard Vincent noted that substantial:

...inconvenience has been caused to the Sheffield public having business at the General Post Office by the crowding and work entailed there by the representatives of a postal customer to the extent of about £18,000 a year, owing to the refusal of the authorities to collect the registered packets of his firm as they did prior to the reduction in the postage rate by the last Postmaster General.¹⁵⁷

For Vincent, the situation was becoming intolerable and required the Postmaster General to intervene and 'give directions for the ordinary business practice of all carriers to be at once resumed so that mutual annoyance and loss of time may be [further] avoided'.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² *Daily Mail* (26th February, 1901), p. 4.

¹⁵³ 'Private Postal Collections-Sheffield Case'. House of Commons Debate (28 February, 1901).

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Chamberlain retaliated and warned Graves that if he persisted in carrying on with such actions, legal proceedings would be issued against him.¹⁵⁹ However Graves' refusal to concede led to further displays of his frustration and in March 1901 the *Daily Mail* noted that the firm had increased its requisition of cabs to fifty.¹⁶⁰ The 'half-mile long decorated cabs again wended their way along the streets of the northern city' complete with 'appropriate mottos' such as 'why should Sheffield's trade be throttled?' and 'advance Sheffield – if the post office will let you'.¹⁶¹

Sheffield's streets, suggested the article was not only filled with 'enterprising photographers busily employed taking snapshots and the cinematograph industriously recording every incident of this strange contest,' but was also 'largely observed as a holiday as people crowded the neighbourhood eager to watch the progress of the struggle'.¹⁶²



Figure 9. Graves' employees marching through Sheffield (circa 1899). Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. Newspaper Cuttings, 658.872SSTF.

The dispute between the Post Office and Graves lasted almost three years and its resolution in late March 1901 was announced when Chamberlain informed the House that the Post Office had finally agreed to sanction the collection of all registered letters and parcels (under certain conditions) from the premises of private firms who may desire to post such articles in large numbers.¹⁶³ The following month in April 1901 Sir George Murray, the secretary to the Post Office addressed the Nottinghamshire and Midland Merchants and Traders Association. Murray, speaking on behalf of Lord Londonderry, suggested that whilst it had not been initially 'practicable for the Postmaster of Sheffield to have complied at once

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ 'Advance, Sheffield! Post Office again attacked by Graves' Forces', *Daily Mail* (1st March, 1901), p. 3.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Figures 9 & 10: Newspaper cuttings, J. G. Graves, 658.872SSTF, courtesy of SLSL.

¹⁶³ 'Certain conditions' included the official collection of postal bags, letter and parcels from the premises of private firms where the postage amounted to not less than £10.00 and where the number collected amounted to ten daily or fifty weekly. Reported in: *Our Home* (18th May, 1901). See also: 'Private Postal Collections-Sheffield Case.' House of Commons Debate, 26th March, 1901.

with Mr. Graves' demands,' the Post Office had now conceded and firms would now be 'enable[d] to have their registered letters or parcels collected by Post Office messengers'.¹⁶⁴

The resolution in Graves' favour saw the Sheffield Company celebrate its victory in grand style, and Graves repaid the loyalty of his workforce with a day's paid holiday.¹⁶⁵ In turn the employees festooned the outside of the company's head office with banners, bunting and red pillar boxes complete with images of J. G.

Graves cast as a hero and 'embowered in a wreath of laurels' (figure 10).¹⁶⁶ In contrast the images of 'government officials [appeared] in tears'.¹⁶⁷ The dispute and its outcome were reported in a wealth of newspapers, journals and magazines and Graves received a plethora of congratulatory messages from customers and other like-minded businessmen.¹⁶⁸



Figure 10. 1901 Caricature of Graves' employees celebrating victory over the Post Office dispute. *Telegraph Chronicle* (26 April, 1901). Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library). 658.872SSTF.

Many of these messages bestowed upon Graves the ultimate accolade: the recognition that the Sheffield businessman had successfully instigated a programme of reform concerning Britain's postal service.¹⁶⁹ Graves' victory over the Post Office, as Coopey et al acknowledge, demonstrated that Britain's mail order retailers 'now among the Post Office's major customers could flex their muscles to some effect' and were positioned to 'modify the existing communications infrastructure in the interests of retailers'.¹⁷⁰

Encouraging the Post Office to reconsider and reappraise its relationship with expanding and modernising businesses was particularly important for Graves, whose business continued to expand. By 1902, Sheffield's White's Directory records Graves' business occupying a total of fourteen premises scattered across Sheffield's town centre, which ranged from drapers, clothiers and footwear warehouses to cutlery manufacturers, printing

¹⁶⁴ *Telegraph Chronicle* (26th April, 1901).

¹⁶⁵ *Our Home* (18th May, 1901).

¹⁶⁶ *Telegraph Chronicle* (26th April, 1901).

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ For examples of newspaper reports regarding the Post Office dispute see: Newspaper cuttings, J. G. Graves, Ref. 658.872SSTF, SLSL.

¹⁶⁹ A series of articles appeared in newspapers, journals and magazines across Britain. For examples see: *Glasgow Daily Record* (1st December, 1900); *Weekly Times* (7th April, 1901); *Our Home* (18th May, 1901).

¹⁷⁰ Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 19.

offices, jewellers, showrooms and cabinet makers.¹⁷¹ Other departments consisted of the Correspondence Section dealing with orders and transactions, an Imperial Department (whose sole remit was to deal with customers living and working across the Empire) and a number of despatch warehouses, one of which was located in Birmingham.¹⁷² The company's administration was conducted through four city centre branch offices located at, Trippet Lane, St' Paul's Parade, Western Bank and Pinstone Street.¹⁷³ With growing sales of the firm's pocket watches, Graves was also employing over sixty watchmakers to repair and service the items, many of which carried the Graves brand name alongside such iconic titles as Imperial, Autocrat, the National Hunter and Paddington.¹⁷⁴

Sheffield's cutlery and tool manufacturing heritage also provided the company with an added fillip. By 1903 the business was manufacturing its own range of cutlery and tools which bore the company's name and Graves' own trade mark which he had obtained in 1903.¹⁷⁵ In manufacturing, the company's range of goods included cabinets, furniture, gardening implements and electro-plated items such as trophies and presentation gifts. Its dinner and glassware, sourced from 'the best potteries in England' were packaged in the company's own boxes, crates and cases which themselves were constructed in the firm's own packaging factory with wood imported from Norway.¹⁷⁶ Serving the diverse needs, wants and desires of a growing consumer audience through a wide choice of commodities had the added bonuses of deferred payments, an efficient delivery service, inspection periods of seven days and a free returns policy. By 1903 the business, reportedly grossing an annual turnover of almost one million pounds, according to the *Review of Reviews*, had become the largest mail-order house in Britain.¹⁷⁷ Its substantial operations requiring a large and diverse workforce provided employment opportunities for many of Sheffield's working class population and these positions varied from white collar/blouse and managerial roles to manual, domestic and manufacturing opportunities. At the company's height, its workforce

¹⁷¹ *White's Directory of Sheffield* (1902), p. 510. 914.274S SLSL.

¹⁷² *Review of Reviews* (November, 1903).

¹⁷³ *White's Directory of Sheffield* (1902), p. 510.

¹⁷⁴ References to these watches can be found in both the local and the national press and also in a selection of Graves' early company catalogues. J. G. Graves Ltd: Mail Order Catalogues, 1900-1965. Boxes 1-5, 659.133 SSTF, SLSL.

¹⁷⁵ Trade Mark Registry, Hallamshire District (13th November, 1903). Reg. number 38883., *Trade Marks Journal* No. 1313.

¹⁷⁶ 'Let's talk of Graves.' Promotional literature of J. G. Graves, (circa, 1902), p. 23. Local Papers, Vol. 261, SLSL.

¹⁷⁷ *Review of Reviews*, (November, 1903), pp. 531-542.

ranged from packers and postal runners to clerks, apprentices, typesetters, artists, engravers, electroplaters, printers, artisans, craftsmen and manufacturers.¹⁷⁸ Reportedly receiving up to twenty thousand letters daily, over eighty clerks were employed to deal with the growing amount of correspondence.¹⁷⁹ The firm's printing works boasted of its use of the 'latest labour saving' machinery, which, 'could hold its own with any firm in the country for artistic commercial printing'.¹⁸⁰

Graves was one of the leading exponents of the British mail order enterprise. His fledgling business attempts proved successful and his ability to engage with consumers was clearly demonstrated through a determined and innovative business strategy and structure. The company's turnover demanded a programme that ensured efficient production, quick and effective distribution and a marketing agenda that was both attractive and engaging for consumers. It also demanded an efficient delivery system and that entailed a programme of reform by the Post Office and the establishment of a productive working relationship between the two parties. Successful advertising drove the enterprise forward and as Coopey et al note, while the competition between the leading mail order entrepreneurs was 'sharpening', it was, Graves 'extensive advertising' that saw him establish 'a foothold in agency mail order by the early years of the century'.¹⁸¹ The first full household catalogues *Opportunities* appeared to be a fitting title for a company whose founder had risen from a pedlar to successful businessman.¹⁸²

Innovative mail order entrepreneurs, such as the Fattorinis' of Bradford, Graves of Sheffield and Kay of Worcester recognised and tapped into the marketing potential of mail order. In essence they seized an opportunity. That opportunity increased the availability, accessibility and affordability of commodities for a wider social audience of consumers. Selectively borrowing from the American model, the British mail order entrepreneurs recognised that the retailing programme could be adapted to suit a British market and British consumers. While the early American mail order traders initially sought to serve the needs of rural consumers, their British counterparts established their businesses within an urbanised

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 534-542.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 534.

¹⁸⁰ 'Let's Talk of Graves', p. 24.

¹⁸¹ Coopey, et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 21.

¹⁸² The earliest catalogues appeared as *Home Circle* but this had been changed to *Opportunities* by the early 1900s when they appeared as much fuller versions.

environment. From the outset Graves, the Fattorinis and Kay recognised that mail order need not be restricted to the service of rural and remote consumers. Adapting the model, they honed in on the attraction of credit, instant gratification, choice and convenience and it was these four areas of consumer activity that the British businessmen sought to popularise and fashioned their programmes on. While the British concerns did not share the size and scale of their American operatives, they adapted the model for a British audience of consumers. It is within this context that the roots of British mail order have to be explored and evaluated.

Chapter Two

Advertising the Advertiser

Agents, Advocates, Catalogues and Counters

Popularising the concept and practice of early mail order required a marketing policy of both advertising and selling through agents. Prior to their entry into large-scale mail order and having already gained some retailing and advertising experience, three of Britain's leading mail order pioneers, John Graves of Sheffield, William Kilbourne Kay of Worcester and the Fattorini family of Bradford, had already recognised the potential of this marketing activity. By the 1890s Graves, through his time spent as an apprentice, a peddler and small jewellery retailer, had witnessed the profits to be gained through a programme of astute advertising. Similarly, and particularly through their establishments of watch clubs and engagement with the railways, William Kilbourne Kay and the Fattorinis of Bradford had gained a great deal of understanding in the practice of contract and social selling techniques. Having recognised their marketing capabilities, their target areas and their potential future customers, all three business operatives began to embrace a menu of innovative marketing strategies.

The aim of this chapter is to examine how both the catalogue and the agent compensated for the absence of the counter and the shop worker. Initially focussing upon the production of enticing and socially engaging marketing literature, the chapter will explore the production of Graves' catalogues. It will consider the catalogue's compilation, the astute use of engaging narrative and its ability to establish and convey a surrogate form of social communication between retailer and consumer. Through an evaluation of primary material and secondary literature, including Coopey et al's examination on the roots and growth of British mail order and Onufrijchuk and Rittenberg's research on the effectiveness of catalogue production, the chapter will argue that the firm produced a successful advertising programme that both engaged and interacted with its target audience.¹ It will demonstrate that while the firm selectively borrowed from the American format of catalogues, it adapted its marketing material to identify with and attract a British consumer audience. It was this

¹ Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*; Roman Onufrijchuk, 'Origins of the Consumer Culture,' in Leiss, Kline & Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising*, pp. 49-89.
Max Rittenberg, *Direct Mail and Mail Order*.

attention to detail that allowed the company to selectively and strategically broaden its customer scope.

The chapter will then focus upon early mail order's use of agents, travellers and advocates. It will explore their recruitment, roles and remits and compare and contrast Graves' use of agents with his mail order competitors, William Kilbourne Kay and the Fattorinis. It will examine the businessmen's desires to position agents within defined and designated working class communities and discuss why this held such significance to the popularisation of large scale mail order. Within this context it will analyse the firms' awareness of (and mail order's attempts to tap into) the interconnections between consumer habits, social recognition and community allegiances. Adding to this analysis, the chapter will consider the role of agents as penny and parlour capitalists and will discuss the differing viewpoints of Benson and Coopey et al.² This area of discussion also provides a focus point to evaluate Graves' recruitment programme, one that sought to align the benefits of agency work with messages of self-improvement, economic gain and social progression. The chapter will also explore the place of women agents. It will consider the different approaches adopted by the companies in relation to women's recruitment, the gendered advertising rhetoric employed by the firm of J. G. Graves and the unofficial roles that women played as advocates of mail order. While women did not appear to feature in Graves' agency programme (and certainly his recruitment drive was aimed at men) women's contributions as sales accomplices to their agent husbands has to be considered alongside the wider aspects of mail order agency and the activities of J. G. Graves.

Catalogues and Counters

Although a form of mail order had already been firmly established by the time J. G. Graves, the Fattorinis and William Kay had moved into large scale mail order, such activity was essentially a supplementary programme and an adjunct of large and reputable department stores. Aimed at a wealthier clientele, stores such as A. W. Gamage, John Noble and Marshall and Snelgrove had developed their mail order agenda as early as the 1870s, the latter of which by 1888 was employing over one hundred staff serving customers' needs and desires through its 'Country Room'.³ Not only did such stores offer the incentives of

² John Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*; Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*.

³ Coopey et al., *Mail Order retailing in Britain*, p. 14.

convenience and home delivery but provided deposit accounts that accrued interest on unspent balances.⁴ However these gratifying customer programmes were mainly aimed at middle-class consumers looking to fashion their homes and lifestyles with the latest trends, styles and home comforts. For Graves, the Fattorinis and Kilbourne Kay, the main attraction of mail order lay in the establishment of the large independent and centralised enterprise. Seeking to attract the working and lower middle classes to this consumer activity, their remits revolved around choice, competitive prices, convenience and programmes of credit.⁵

However establishing profitable and viable businesses and attracting these consumer classes required the entrepreneurs to address a series of issues. Recognising the establishment of a good retailer/customer relationship was vital and reassuring potential customers that their method of trading was respectable, reputable and legitimate were high on their business agendas. They also had to fill the void of the shop worker, introduce an alternative form of social interaction and sales dialogue and address such problems as the haptic experience associated with over-the-counter sales. In addition they had to compete with city centre retailers who had been steadily increasing and modernising their own programmes and practices since the 1870s. Indeed, the urbanised centre of Sheffield, in which John Graves was operating, had seen a rapid growth of stores intent on improving both the facilities and the customer experience. Similarly the towns of Worcester and Bradford (Kay and Fattorini's centres of administration) had also seen a rise in retailing establishments. In Bradford the arrival of the department store, Brown and Muff's, with its offers of quality goods and comfortable shopping environment signalled its intent to modernise, and Worcester's 'general appearance, neatness, good order, and its many modern shops situated throughout its broad streets' was already noted in the Trade Directory of 1860.⁶ In Sheffield, the emergence of Cole Brothers (1869) Atkinsons (1890's) Cockaynes (1897) and John Walsh's (1900) all signalled attempts to improve the city centre

⁴ *Yesterday's Shopping: An anthology of Gamage's Mail Order Catalogues* (Herts, 1994), p. 10.

⁵ For wider discussion concerning Graves credit programme see chapter 3, 'Captivating an Audience.'

⁶ For history of Brown and Muff's see: <https://www.housefraserarchive.ac.uk>, for Worcester see: 1860 Post Office Directory Worcester Public History: <https://www.midlandspubs.co.uk/worcestershire>. Accessed, November, 2016.

and further the incentives for shoppers to visit.⁷ As Alison Adburgham observes, by 1893 Sheffield's Cole Brothers was 'considered very progressive' with its supply of electricity, a passenger lift and its connection to the telephone network.⁸ Furthermore, Walsh's newest store, opened in 1900 and constructed of 'steel and glass on the ground floor and Huddersfield stone on the upper floors', gave it a 'striking appearance'.⁹ Selling a wide range of commodities it was set to compete with its city centre rivals such as Cockaynes who by 1899 had also established its own furniture manufacturing department.¹⁰ For these established retailers, enhancing the shopping experience involved a programme of renovating, improving and adapting their environments. Modernising and introducing both aesthetically pleasing and practical embellishments involved such provisions as customer seating areas, restaurants, resident pianists, wider aisles, wrapping services, toilet facilities and attentive sales staff. Atkinsons, a family run store in the centre of Sheffield, sought to increase its popularity by offering customers a modern and comfortable environment to shop. Its carefully constructed and attractively laid out departments with their wide choice of commodities was further enhanced by the systematic production of its own advertising literature. Boasting of the store's personal service, attention to customer needs, range of commodities and a home delivery service, even for light goods easily transportable by the customers themselves, was a signal of the shop's intention to compete with its retailing neighbours.¹¹ Indeed the store, recognising the needs of its male clientele, offered a 'secluded department' where the personal and 'sympathetic' attention of trained salesmen could alleviate the 'shy[ness]' of its male shoppers.¹²

This increasing attention to service with choice, variety, attractive atmospheres, attentive sales staff and opportunities to handle and try goods (the haptic experience) were all signs that heralded the modernisation of retailing. These were also issues for which Graves and

⁷ David Hey, *A History of Sheffield* (Lancaster, 2010), pp. 224-228. For Atkinsons see: Rachael Richardson, 'Opportunity Knocks: The Development of Sheffield's West End Suburbia', unpublished BA dissertation (2003), Sheffield Hallam University.

⁸ Alison Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping, 1800-1914* (London, 1964), p. 234.

⁹ Hey, *A History of Sheffield*, p. 225.

¹⁰ Cockaynes: Sheffield Archives, SY/492/B.

¹¹ Rachael Richardson, 'Opportunity Knocks: The Development of Sheffield's West-End Suburbia. Unpublished BA dissertation, Sheffield Hallam University, (2003).

¹² 'Comfort for the Man Shopper', Advertising literature of Atkinson's Department Store, circa, 1926. This archival material is retained by Atkinson's store but is available to view on appointment. See also: Richardson, 'Opportunity Knocks', p. 79.

his contemporaries had to find compensatory measures, including attempting to introduce an element of glamour to their retailing practices. Filling the void of the haptic was a relatively simple issue for Graves. His offer of a seven day inspection period and the guarantee of the deposit's refund, already a tried and tested practice by the businessman, overcame the haptic issue and arguably gave Graves an advantage over his city centre rivals. However, overcoming the absence of social interaction and persuasive sales rhetoric required the adoption of an innovative and engaging menu of advertising literature.

Pioneers such as Graves already understood the rewards and merits of good advertising. His experience using the classified sections in newspapers and journals and the production of early trade circulars (which by the 1890s had developed into a series of periodicals) had already proved their marketing value. Produced on a monthly basis and often referred to as *Guidebooks* or *Standard works of reference*, their appeal had been enhanced by adopting sentimental and evocative titles such as *Opportunities* and *Home Circle*.¹³ By 1903, an edition of the *Review of Reviews*, a Victorian monthly Journal covering stories around the globe, had suggested that Graves' early periodicals had 'the promise and potency of a magazine' and one that held much appeal 'for the general reader'.¹⁴

This potency of a magazine and its appeal to the general reader equated to far more than the simple production of marketing literature. Both an engineered and structured form of advertising, its format was intended to introduce, ingratiate, socially interconnect and simulate the impression of a community of shoppers. As Rittenberg's early analysis of mail order suggests, successful advertising was not only 'bound up with a knowledge of the social sciences' but the catalogues themselves had to 'look valuable' by adding 'matter [that was] interesting' and relevant to its target audience.¹⁵ In similar format to its American counterparts, Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward, the firm of Graves sought to produce sales literature that marketed the commodity, the company and connected with customers. The format, a relatively simple one, was to produce catalogues that filled the void of the shop worker and engaged with customers through a surrogate form of social interaction and

¹³ References to the publications as a 'guidebook' and 'standard work of reference' can be seen in an edition of *The Newsman* (February 4, 1899), p. 4.

¹⁴ *Review of Reviews*, (November, 1903), p. 537.

¹⁵ Max Rittenberg, *Direct Mail and Mail Order*, p. 1 and pp. 64-65.

sales rhetoric. By giving the catalogues shape and form through the additions of supplementary reading material - articles, domestic hints and tips, virtual tours of the company's departments and customer testimonials - the catalogues added to their readability factor and attraction. While Montgomery Ward's catalogues included tips on seasonal dress codes, cycling for ladies, maintaining an attractive garden, preserving the roof of your farm house and the art of wallpaper hanging, Sears Roebuck's included etiquette advice, homeopathic remedies, beauty treatments and home and life style guides.¹⁶ For Graves, such additional material included tips on ironing, jam making and baking recipes, how to avoid a shabby home, ideas for self-betterment, customer recommendations and information on his company's business methods.¹⁷

While all designed to market the commodity and reinforce the legitimacy of his operations, the supplementary material was also a recognition by Graves that the development of a consumer/retailer relationship was important. Graves, like his American contemporaries, had grasped the need to produce a quasi, supplementary and surrogate form of social interaction, and one that alleviated the perception of distance and remoteness between retailer and consumer. The inclusion of customer testimonials was a particular agenda used by Graves to generate sales and project a community of shoppers that were loyal to the firm. While not a new practice amongst advertisers, they were an important addendum for Graves. In November 1902 an edition of *Opportunities* carried customers' testimonials from London and Wales purportedly appreciating the quality of the firm's jewellery, watches, costumes and fashions.¹⁸ Similarly in June 1903, the catalogue featured testimonials for Graves' 'system of business' and the quality of his sewing machines from 'satisfied customers' from London and Devon.¹⁹ Four months earlier in February 1903 the company boasted of receiving over 13,000 testimonials from across the British Isles; the boast, while unable to be authenticated, was a demonstration of the firm's grasp on the merits of

¹⁶ 1895 edition of Montgomery Ward & Company catalogue, on dress codes see pp. 33-37; on house husbandry see pp. 340, 386, and 392; on cycling, see p. 348; Sears Roebuck and Company catalogue (1897), pp. 33-50.

¹⁷ 'Hints for the home:' J. G. Graves scrapbook, SLSL. (This item as yet remains unreferenced by the SLSL); Self-Betterment initiative: 'He's a Trier: *Opportunities* (circa 1910), Box 1 659.133SSTF; 'How to avoid a shabby home' *Opportunities* (1905) Box 1, 659.133SSTF SLSL. For wider discussion on self-betterment and other gendered related issues connected to catalogues and consumption see chapters 3 and 4.

¹⁸ *Opportunities* (November, 1902), Box 1, 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

¹⁹ *Opportunities* (June, 1903), Box 4. 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

recommendations and their ability to augment sales.²⁰ For the firm of J. G. Graves, such testimonials and their inclusion in the catalogues served a dual purpose; promoting the commodity through a process of consumer social recognition and authenticating the company's business methods. Expanding upon this, while Leiss et al suggests testimonials 'tend to visually stress the attributes associated with the user' rather than the 'act of use' itself, Rittenberg proposes that testimonials and recommendations attached to the early mail order programmes had a capacity to secure more sales than simple advertising itself.²¹ If testimonials did have the capacity to socially identify with and connect with customers while simultaneously augmenting sales, then their inclusion in the catalogues was an astute and shrewd advertising policy adopted by the Sheffield firm. Furthermore, while the aim of the testimonials was to complement the product, the supplementary features and articles were aimed to compliment the consumer. By producing catalogues that resembled the appearance of a magazine or journal, the company demonstrated its grasp of marketing techniques and tactically targeted its audience. It clearly understood the need to foster a good retailer/consumer relationship.

While Schlereth suggests the American catalogues represented a 'department store between book covers,' Onufrijchuk argues that their compilation failed to embrace a modernising theme.²² In particular, suggests Onufrijchuk, Sears' continual harking back to 'artisanal values' and character left the catalogues 'devoid of personal references' and as such unable to depict real people living real lives.²³ This was an issue that Graves' firm did not have to overcome. Unlike its American counterparts, Graves' business did not have its early roots in an audience of rural dwellers, remote homesteaders and farmers. Rather, from its outset the Sheffield firm identified with and developed alongside Britain's growing urban population. Essentially Graves' business and its target audience, the working and rising lower middle classes, were already mapped out and the two were emerging together. Associating advertising material with contemporary and relevant supplementary articles,

²⁰ *Opportunities* (February, 1903), Box 2: 659.133SSTF. SLSL. Examples of testimonials can also be seen in: 'J. G. Graves, Receipts and Adverts,' 1897-1898. Ref: 658.872SS. SLSL.

²¹ Leiss, Kline & Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising*, p. 280; Max Rittenberg, *Direct Mail and Mail Order*, pp. 229-230.

²² Thomas Schlereth 'Country Stores, County Fairs and Mail-Order Catalogues: Consumption in Rural America', in Simon J. Bronner (ed), *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920* (London, 1989), p. 373; Onufrijchuk, 'Origins of the Consumer Culture', p. 78.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-78.

features and testimonials was therefore not a challenge for Graves as it appeared to be for Sears Roebuck. This contrast between the two enterprises is interesting. While the early customers of American mail order were initially remote and therefore relied heavily upon the marketing literature of catalogues, the opposite was true for Britain's consumers. Their reliance had been upon the static shop, the department store and village amenities. As such, Graves' challenge was to address the void of familiarity and the loss of face to face sales rhetoric associated with over the counter sales. It was this absence of familiarity that the firm and its marketing material had to overcome.

Communicating to customers through a programme of innovative and engineered catalogues presented a host of opportunities. The firm could try to identify, include, exclude, convey and communicate a series of contemporary meanings and messages that fitted and complimented the business and its target audience. By the early 1900s the company had established its own printing and advertising department at Sheffield's Portobello Street and began in earnest to produce regularly up-dated catalogues.²⁴ Employing a large workforce of printers, artists, engravers and photographers, Graves insisted that not only were his 'ambitious workers [intent on] produc[ing] the ideal,' but the production of the company's catalogues should be 'up-to-date [and] conducted on the very latest lines'.²⁵ With the employment of skilled workers and the use of modern printing methods, the advertising department's remit was much more than simply maintaining a regular production of sales lists. If the testimonials, advice columns, recommendations and articles failed to grab the reader's attention, then virtual tours of the company's various departments made alternative attempts to connect with customers. Several editions of *Opportunities* carried features extolling the firm's extensive enterprise, including information on the company's business welfare programme, advice on the firm's advertising department, a lengthy article detailing the company's foreign and imperial section and details of its manufacturing establishments.²⁶ In a 1902 autumn edition of *Opportunities* customers were introduced to the company's industrial betterment programme. The

²⁴ The 1902 edition of White's Directory of Sheffield notes the occupancy of J. G. Graves printing Department located at Portobello Street, Sheffield. 914.274S, p. 510. SLSL.

²⁵ *Review of Reviews* (November, 1903), p. 537; Graves, J. G. 'The Art of Advertising', *Opportunities*, No. 5 (February, 1903), p. 2. Box 1, 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

²⁶ J. G. Graves, 'The Art of Advertising - Our Colonial and Foreign Customers', *Opportunities*, No. 15, (circa 1905). Box 1, 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

feature, sanctioning a modern industrial approach, highlighted Graves' personal concern for the health and welfare of his employees, alerted readers to the company's adoption of a superannuation scheme and described a wealth of other staff benefits such as holiday clubs, discounted staff restaurants and staff social groups.²⁷ The article also resounded and reinforced the firm's respectable ethos, its provision of a gymnasium, sports ground, reading rooms and a conservatory and its intention to manage its operations based upon a socially inclusive staff policy.²⁸ Three years later, the catalogues introduced customers to the firm's 'Premier' manufacturing sections, the packing departments and the firm's central showrooms where customers were encouraged to visit and view the latest designs in products.²⁹ With its emphasis upon the employment of skilled craftsmen, the use of the 'latest up-to-date' machinery, artist's impressions showing the firm's skilled artisans at work and Graves heralding his workforce of the 'highest character,' the article concluded by suggesting that the firm was recognised in the 'most distant parts of the Kingdom'.³⁰ Whether expressing the firm's engagement with modern business practices, enlightening customers of the latest commodities or conveying social meanings and messages, the compilation of the firm's marketing material was clearly engineered and constructed to attract and maintain the attention of customers.

While compiling the catalogues fulfilled one business agenda, circulating and popularising them required another. Ensuring that the company connected with a wide audience of consumers, it also used a secondary form of advertising to alert potential customers of the catalogues' availability. Adding addendums at the end of classified sections of newspapers and attempting to stimulate interest through insertions in popular magazines and periodicals, the company suggested that its extended range of items, all obtainable post free 'across the kingdom', were available to everyone.³¹ The determination to reach a mass audience was evident from the extent of secondary advertising it engaged in. Editions such as *Pullman's Weekly* (1903), the *Boston Guardian* (1899), *The Weekly Budget* (1900), the *Herts Advertiser* (1899), and the *Dundee Weekly* (1899) all invited enquiries from

²⁷ *Opportunities* (1902). Also, reprinted in *Sheffield Daily Independent* (October 29, 1902), pp. 4-5. Boxes 1 & 2. 659.133SSTF. SL. For wider discussion on Graves' programme of business welfare see chapter six.

²⁸ *Opportunities* (1902). Also reprinted in *Sheffield Daily Independent* (October 29th, 1902), pp. 4-5.

²⁹ *Opportunities* (circa 1905), Box 4. 659.133SSTF. SL.

³⁰ *Ibid.*,

³¹ *Review of Reviews* (November, 1903), p. 541.

prospective customers, as did the *North Wales Observer* (1899), *The Bolton Evening News* (1903), *Northern Gossip* (1899) and the *Western Gazette* (1903).³² In addition to regional newspapers, the company also targeted a wealth of national and respectable publications, including *The Ladies Companion* (1899), *Police Review* (1900), *Woman's Life* (1902), *Christian Budget* (1901), *People's Weekly* (1899) and the *Puritan Temperance Companion* (1899).³³ While the extent of this secondary advertising campaign is undoubtedly impressive, this wealth of primary evidence also highlights the diversity of the audience the firm was attempting to attract and connect with. The careful monitoring of the advertisements, their placements and their relativity to specific goods and target audience was clearly well-planned. While papers such as *Bolton Evening News* (1903) advertised the sale of tools, the *Puritan Temperance Companion* four years earlier had been selected to advertise dressing cases, writing cases and Opera Glasses.³⁴ In 1900, general household items were promoted in *The Weekly Budget* whilst fine china and glassware appeared in an edition of *Our Home*.³⁵ Similarly, *The Ladies Companion* (1899) featured the best quality and latest designs in jewellery and selected gifts, whilst an edition of the *Northern Weekly Gazette* in the same year carried the headline 'cheap cutlery and jewellery'.³⁶ While the firm's catalogues were significantly smaller than their American A4 counterparts, J. G. Graves' 200 page editions, suggested the *Dundee Weekly News* in 1899, were 'profusely illustrated' and desirably arranged.³⁷ The following year, with their size increased to 300 pages, readers of the *Police Review* were encouraged to send off for 'the voluminous and comprehensive' latest copies which were not only 'crowded with illustrations' but served as 'a most useful document for permanent reference'.³⁸

³² *Pullman's Weekly* (May 5, 1903); *Boston Guardian* (March, 1899); *Weekly Budget* (October 13, 1900); *Herts Advertiser* (February 11, 1899); *Dundee Weekly* (February 11, 1899); *North Wales Observer* (March 3, 1899); *Bolton Evening News* (May 2, 1903); *Northern Gossip* (February 11, 1899); *Western Gazette* (May 1, 1903). Examples of these and further advertisements and features can be seen at the Sheffield Local Studies Library. See: J. G. Graves, Receipts and Adverts, 658.872SS.

³³ Examples of compliments and recommendations added by the journal editors included: "a most useful document for permanent reference," *Police Review* (October 7, 1900); "I have every confidence in recommending Mr. J. G. Graves," *Lady's Companion* (February 28, 1899); "One of the finest business catalogues that we have seen for a long time," *Telegraph Chronicle* (February 3, 1899).

³⁴ *Bolton Evening News* (March 2, 1903); *The Puritan Temperance Companion* (February 25, 1899 & September 23, 1899).

³⁵ *Weekly Budget* (October 13, 1900); *Our Home* (November, 3, 1900).

³⁶ *The Ladies Companion* (February 25, 1899); *The Northern Weekly Gazette* (February 28, 1899).

³⁷ *Dundee Weekly News* (February, 11, 1899).

³⁸ *Police Review* (October, 7th 1900).

The company's efforts to attract a diverse audience of consumers certainly embraced and utilised the advertising medium to its fullest capacity. By the early 1900s, it appears that the secondary advertising campaign had reaped rewards. With impressive numbers of contacts, the catalogues, reported to be over 400,000 copies per month, were enjoying circulation across Britain and the empire.³⁹ Furthermore the firm also boasted of its global popularity when it announced its catalogues were 'being welcomed into the homes of Russian, Swedish, French, American, Turkish, German, Icelandic and Chinese customers'.⁴⁰ Such boasts were given added weight by the firm's regular engagement of young 'scholars' employed to fold, address, stamp and dispatch the material.⁴¹

The determination to produce catalogues that represented a department store between book covers was complimented by the firm's ability to recognise the catalogues' extended possibilities. The firm understood that the catalogues had to substitute the void of the shop worker and their sales rhetoric, and while simple advertisements held marketing value, sales could be augmented by producing material that held the customer's attention. By inserting articles, placing features and adding testimonials, the catalogues took on the format of a magazine and this not only enhanced their quality but also helped to forge and cement an effective consumer/retailer relationship.

Agents and Advocates: Pit heads and Public Houses

For Kay, the Fattorinis and the early days of Graves' operations, attracting large communities of the working classes fell to the remit of salaried male travellers and commissioned agents. The travellers, often sourced via the recruitment sections of local and national newspapers, were the intermediaries tasked with sourcing respectable and responsible working-class men willing to act as mail order agents. Paying visits to prospective agents' workplaces or frequenting their social environments, the salaried travellers initiated their respective company's interests, interviewed prospective agents, conducted discreet enquires and once satisfied recommended appointments. Sourcing the right qualities and character of prospective agents was paramount for the companies.

³⁹ *Review of Reviews* (November, 1903), p. 537.

⁴⁰ 'On Special Service', *Opportunities* (1902) Box 1, 659.133 SSTF SLSL.

⁴¹ *Review of Reviews* (November, 1903), p. 537.

Seeking honest, respectable and responsible working-class men with both a degree of integrity and some basic education was important, particularly as they were responsible for the placement of orders, the despatch of customers' goods, and for some, the collection of weekly payments.⁴²

For all three mail order pioneers, identifying target areas and sourcing the right quality of agent became a serious business. The Fattorinis instructed their travellers to frequent every 'pithead, public house and factory gate'.⁴³ These organised and intentional placements not only provided numerous introductions between traveller and prospective agents, but gave the travellers an ability to talk to a prospective agent's associates and work colleagues. This informal yet strategic form of character referencing, as Coopey et al note, was keenly advised by Joseph Fattorini who constantly reiterated the need for caution.⁴⁴ For Fattorini ensuring those 'who invariably turn out wrong [were] not employed' was paramount.⁴⁵ Kay's travellers were also issued with similar directives. Offering the company's travellers a regular salary and their own bicycle, Kay ordered them to remain in one central area for the duration of several weeks; a practice suggested Kay, which would enable the company to secure a rapid and sustained growth of agents from a variety of workplaces.⁴⁶ While clearly optimising outlets to generate sales, the firm's emphasis upon the thorough vetting and scrutiny of potential agents was direct and to the point. In a letter dated 27th September 1907, Kay provided his travellers with a series of guidelines and exacting instructions. These included 'using your wits' to discover the 'agents habits', visiting their homes in the evenings to determine their level of respectability and degree of domestic cleanliness and 'staying for a period of thirty minutes' to engage in chat.⁴⁷ Kay, like Fattorini, also instructed his travellers to make discreet enquiries with work colleagues, ascertain period of residency and establish whether they were members of a sick club such as Oddfellows or Forresters.⁴⁸

For both the Fattorinis and William Kilbourne Kay the recruitment of travellers and agents became a serious and often dictatorial display of control and officialdom. For the Fattorinis,

⁴² It is unclear whether J. G. Graves' agents were responsible for collecting money.

⁴³ Beaver, *A Pedlar's Legacy*, p. 46.

⁴⁴ Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 90.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴⁶ Instruction to Travellers: Letter from William Kilbourne Kay to Travellers (September 27, 1907), 970.5:720/BA5946/3. W.A.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

‘window cleaners’, and curiously, as Coopey et al acknowledge, those ‘people in cathedral towns’, should be avoided or treated as circumspect.⁴⁹ Ensuring his travellers, ‘got amongst the right class of men’ was paramount for Kay.⁵⁰ Kay’s exacting instructions however did not avoid the recruitment of deviant agents altogether. In 1909, the businessman mounted a scathing attack on those travellers attempting to re-appoint previously poor agents.⁵¹ Suggesting that the practice was ‘an utter farce,’ the businessman issued stern instructions that only ‘new blood [and those] vigorous men who [could] push the agency with a view of doing regular business’ should be recruited.⁵² With his focus upon maximising profits and augmenting customer numbers, Kay was certainly not in the business of recruiting poor or ineffective agents.

As with the Fattorinis and Kay, Graves also recognised the relationship between large-scale mail order, its appeal to large sectors of working-class communities and the value of human capital in the form of agents and advocates. Choosing a familiar route of exposure, Graves maximised the use of classified advertisements and directly appealed for agents to represent the Sheffield Company, sell its wares and secure for themselves a second income. At times appearing as addendums at the end of an advertised commodity or alternatively placing an advertisement in the situations vacant columns, the firm ensured it received the maximum amount of publicity on a national scale. In 1897 an advertisement placed in the vacancy section of the *Dundee and Argus Courier* encouraged the application of prospective agents from local factories, warehouses and collieries.⁵³ Recognising the need to tap into these local communities and working environments, the firm suggested it was looking for agents to sell a ‘cheap patented novelty [that would be] eagerly purchased by all classes of workmen’.⁵⁴ Leaving the nature of the novelty obscure yet making explicit its appeal to a working-class audience was both an innovative and enticing strategy. Not only did it hint at the presence of a ready-made audience, but also implied the attainment of a financial reward for minimal effort. Ensuring that the commodity, its prospective sellers and audience of consumers were aligned to generate maximum interest and sales was a tactical marketing

⁴⁹ Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 90.

⁵⁰ Letter from William Kilbourne Kay to Travellers. (September 27, 1907), 3.970.51720/BA5946/3, W. A.

⁵¹ Letter from William Kay to Travellers. (January 20, 1909), 970.51:720/5946/2. Entry No. viii, W. A.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *The Dundee Courier and Argus* (Saturday January 30, 1897), Issue No. 13.601.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

approach. In 1902 an advertisement for agents in the *Yorkshire Post* promised 'good commission' to working men willing to sell 'high class tools' in 'every works'.⁵⁵ The advertisement's specific reference to tools rather than any general commodity appeared to be aimed at the working-class man with a presumed knowledge of tools and the commodity's associated consumer. However the appeal aimed at this specific audience of agent was somewhat suspect. By 1902, the firm was selling a whole host of commodities and tools were certainly not the main stay of its wares. This request for tool agents was effectively an advertisement designed to elicit an initial interest in the business of agency work. Once generated, agents would have infiltrated 'every works' including the factories, pitheads and workshops.

The Agent and the Penny Capitalist

In practice, recruiting agents and positioning them within a programme of social selling was essentially an extended form of 'parlour and penny capitalism', one that benefitted the company and the agent.⁵⁶ While for the firms, utilising an agent's pre-established contacts was a route to profit growth, for the working classes, an opportunity to supplement income from other sources was far from unfamiliar territory. As Benson points out in his analysis of penny capitalists, the working classes from mining communities, factory and quarry towns and fishing villages were not unused to improving their incomes from alternative forms of entrepreneurial activity.⁵⁷ That entrepreneurial activity included the business of selling a range of commodities and comestibles to neighbours, friends and family. Using allotments, living rooms, sculleries and kitchens to sell their wares, miners, fishermen, small manufacturers and those employed in the building and craft trades sold commodities ranging from beer, fish, fruit and vegetables to stockings, knitted garments, string, pegs and small items of furniture.⁵⁸ While Benson acknowledges that the definition of penny capitalists remains obscure (and his suggested definition would not include the activities of mail order agents) arguably there is an association between the endeavours of the penny

⁵⁵ *The Yorkshire Post* (September, 23, 1902).

⁵⁶ Social selling in this context refers to a shared social and economic identity between agent and consumer and which may have aided sales.

⁵⁷ Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*, pp. 1-7. See also: Elizabeth Roberts. 'Working Class Standards of Living in Barrow and Lancaster, 1890-1914', *Economic History Review* xxx/2 (1977), pp. 306-321; Raphael Samuel (ed.), *Village Life and Labour* (London, 1975).

⁵⁸ Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*, pp. 8-41.

capitalists and the work of mail order agents. While an opportunity to supplement income through the activity of mail order agent was relatively new, the working-classes engagement with alternative money-making schemes, many of which involved programmes of community consumption and practices of social selling, was not. Furthermore while Benson's penny capitalists had to 'be prepared to assume risks' and did not include 'out-workers nor the self-employed' he does acknowledge that their search for such additional income was often stimulated by a 'pursuit for economic and social mobility' and a growing recognition of a 'class consciousness'.⁵⁹ It is this aspect of agency work that highlights the interconnectedness between the activities of the penny capitalists and the recruitment programme engaged in by firms such as J. G. Graves.

Graves understood this interconnectedness between the pursuits of social mobility and ventures to supplement income by the working classes. In an appeal for agents in 1902, his company produced a booklet explaining the advantages of becoming one of the firm's representatives. While giving brief details of the agent's responsibilities, the literature also demonstrated the early signs of the company aligning its business venture with messages of social betterment. Known to be a great proponent of the Smilesean ideology, Graves suggested that any 'young men' acting as an agent and engaging in such opportunistic activities were not only in the process of embracing a 'practical opportunity' but were en route to a programme of 'self-improvement'.⁶⁰ In November 1902, Graves again married a request for agents with the meanings of self-betterment and the Smilesean philosophy. Suggesting that the 'common man' who 'lacks something to occupy his mind' presents an unpleasant picture, Graves proposed that men engaging with agency work were not only embracing an opportunity to achieve but such achievements could also benefit their local communities.⁶¹ The commission earned, suggested the recruitment rhetoric could be ploughed back into personal programmes of learning and 'subscriptions for the betterment [of] the district where he lives'.⁶² While the firm was in the business of securing sales and making profits through the recruitment of commissioned agents, it was also associating that recruitment with a wealth of social, philosophical and ideological meanings and messages.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5 & p. 135.

⁶⁰ 'Let's talk of Graves'. (Circa 1902) Souvenir Publication of J. G. Graves Mail Order Firm. Local Papers, Vol. 261. pp. 28-29, SLSL.

⁶¹ 'An Eye Opener', *Opportunities* (November 1902), No. 2. Box 1, 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

⁶² *Ibid.*

In addition, while carrying the moral undertones of a preacher, marrying the marketing agenda with the concepts of social progression and the prospect of self-betterment provided an engaging and thought provoking narrative to attract agents; agents who through a shared language could develop an understanding of the values of self-help. While Benson acknowledges that defining the characteristics and identity of the penny capitalists remains somewhat obscure, the primary evidence from Graves' recruitment programme suggests that similarities between the penny capitalists and the mail order agents did exist.⁶³ Although the agents did not risk any personal financial loss, they were in the business of augmenting their incomes through community marketing initiatives. All of these involved agendas associated with social familiarity, conviviality and for some, the pursuit of self-betterment. As Coopey et al argues, there are definitive 'parallels between [the operations of] mail order agency and the phenomena of working class penny capitalism'.⁶⁴

From Aberdeen to Exeter: A Business of Recruitment

The requirements of a good agent did not only revolve around issues of integrity but also their social connectivity, social allegiances and selling capabilities. By promoting both the commodity and the concept of home shopping, successful agents had the capacity to push their firms' profit margins in the right direction and supplement their own income. The Sheffield firm grasped the value of this inter-relational activity of community consumption well. While the use of the situations vacant columns played its role, so too did a programme of secondary advertising. Placing a request for agents at the end of an advertisement for a commodity was a common practice for the company of J. G. Graves. It also served a dual purpose; the cost of one advertisement yet effectively containing two appeals. In December 1898 *Lloyds Weekly* carried an advertisement for a J. G. Graves pocket watch.⁶⁵ Drawing attention by the use of large font and choice of rhetoric 'Don't buy a pig in a poke', the advertisement was followed by a lengthy notice concerning the legitimacy of the company, terms of payment, inspection periods and finally an appeal for prospective agents.⁶⁶ Often referring to the business as *The Midland Direct Supply Warehouse* or *The World's Supply Warehouse*, the company continued to place similar appeals for agents in a plethora of

⁶³ Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*, p. 128.

⁶⁴ Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 97.

⁶⁵ *Lloyds Weekly* (December, 18, 1898), p. 16.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

newspapers and journals. All chosen to ensure maximum distribution and national publicity, they constantly appeared across Britain's newspapers and literary landscape, including the Welsh edition of *Baner Ac Amserau*, *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, *Manchester Courier*, *Daily Mail*, *Gloucester Citizen*, *Newcastle Courant*, *Ipswich Journal*, *Exeter Flying Post* and the *Lichfield Mercury*.⁶⁷ In 1900, an advertisement in *Reynolds Newspaper* suggested agents could increase their yearly income by introducing new clientele and in 1902 the *Lichfield Mercury* ran an advertisement suggesting that the agents of J. G. Graves could benefit from a good supplementary income with no risk to himself.⁶⁸

In 1904, and alongside a secondary advertising programme, the firm produced and advertised an informational booklet 'About an Agency'.⁶⁹ Looking to secure the interests of further agents, Graves advertised the booklet's availability in the 'partners, travellers and agents' section of newspapers, an example of which appeared in the Bristol edition of the *Western Daily Press* in 1904.⁷⁰ Suggesting the firm offered the 'most remunerative and comprehensive spare time agency work in Great Britain' and reassuring prospective agents that they had 'no personal outlay', the booklet aimed to guide and demonstrate how and why acting as a Graves' agent could benefit both parties.⁷¹ Two years later, the firm attempted to whet the appetite of more prospective agents. In April 1906, the company placed an advertisement in *Reynolds Newspaper* and maximising its intention to attract agents announced that it had paid out the sum of £112,655 19s 9d in commission payments over the previous four years.⁷² The firm of J. G. Graves was using the cost of its advertising space shrewdly.

While all of the mail order entrepreneurs looked to boost sales, augment profits and encourage programmes of selling through social affiliations, their approach to agents and

⁶⁷ *Baner Ac Amserau*, Cymru (January 18, 1899), p. 15; *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* (June 21, 1899), p. 11; *Manchester Courier* (November 8, 1905), p. 3; *Daily Mail* (December 18, 1905), p. 7; *Gloucester Citizen* (September 14, 1906), p. 1; *The Newcastle Courant* (February 18, 1899), p. 7; *The Ipswich Journal* (November 17, 1900), p. 3; *The Exeter Flying Post* (November 10, 1900), page number obscured; *The Lichfield Mercury* (November 14, 1902), p. 2.

Other examples include: *North Devon Journal* (September, 26, 1901), p. 7; *The Cornishman* (November, 16, 1903), p. 14; *The Hull Daily Mail* (November, 8, 1905), p. 8.

⁶⁸ *The Lichfield Mercury* (November 14, 1902), p. 2.

⁶⁹ *Western Daily Press*: Bristol Edition (July 28, 1904), p. 2.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Reynolds Newspaper* (April 1st, 1900); *The Western Times* (April 30, 1906), p. 2.

travellers differed. While Kay and the Fattorinis maintained an authoritative stance towards their representatives, Graves' agents appeared to enjoy much easier directives. In a souvenir booklet published by the company in the early 1900s, Graves, referring to the business as the 'Greatness of Graves' devoted two pages to the advantages of becoming one of the firm's agents.⁷³ The brief, an extraordinarily simple one compared to the directions of his contemporaries, suggested that the Sheffield Company presented a 'splendid opportunity' for 'young men' wishing to engage in agency work.⁷⁴ Their remit, the booklet advised was relatively straightforward: introduce new customers, explain the 'easy terms of payment' and after supplying an order form 'the agent's work had ceased entirely'.⁷⁵ Upon a new order being received by the firm, agents would then receive commission based upon the value of the sale.⁷⁶ Ingratiating rather than hard selling appeared to be Graves' mandate. The simplicity and straightforwardness of Graves' recruitment campaign and subsequent remits was in stark contrast to that of Kay's and the Fattorinis. Whilst the latter's strategy employed both salaried travellers and commissioned agents, Graves' firm appeared to prefer a more direct programme of recruitment. Why this choice was made is unclear; however direct advertising did allow the business to marry its search for respectable and responsible agents to a menu of contemporary social and ideological meanings and messages.

Women: The Unofficial Agent

Coopey et al note that 'female agency and sociability' essentially 'supplied the foundations on which the golden years of British mail order were built'.⁷⁷ Women certainly had a role to play in the agency business but their official appointments were not as eagerly embraced by all companies. Kay was one of the first early mail order entrepreneurs to recognise the potential of women agents, or more to the point the potential custom women could bring to the firm. In the early 1900s, Kay began to seek women agents and issued his travellers with a series of new guidelines. Sanctioning their appointment on the proviso the travellers had gained the consent of the women's husbands, Kay's agency programme was all set to

⁷³ 'Let's talk of Graves', pp. 28-29. SLSL.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁷⁷ Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 100.

tap into the social connectivity and allegiances of women agents.⁷⁸ By 1912, and having targeted a stream of firms with a high ratio of female employees, Kay's travellers had secured women agents across a series of workplaces including 'Brush Works, Corset [manufacturers] and Glove Factories'.⁷⁹

While Kay's public recruitment of female agents may have signalled an emancipatory sign for women agents, there is little evidence to suggest that Graves actively sought the contributions of women agents. During the brief period of time when Graves did recruit agents, his advertisements were certainly heavily gendered in favour of men. Indeed the literature produced during the early 1900s addressed itself to 'young men' who wished to undertake an 'opportunity for self-improvement'.⁸⁰ It appears that the practice of self-improvement by engaging in programmes of agency work was the reserve of men and not for the social or economic aggrandisement of women. While women were targeted by mail order companies for their custom, their recognition as official mail order agents, suggests Coopey et al, only gained significant ground following the introduction of the Married Women and Tortfeasers Act of 1935.⁸¹ The Act, which essentially freed a husband from any civil liabilities incurred by his wife, became the catalyst that stimulated change.⁸² Finally reassuring the Directors of large mail order that the appointment of women agents would not present major problems, several companies began to re-consider their policies on female agents.⁸³

Despite their delayed official recognition, women did often adopt the role of agent in an unofficial capacity. With their husbands' names appearing on the companies' registers, many firms, Coopey suggests, had an awareness that women were actively participating and encouraging sales yet chose to turn a blind eye.⁸⁴ In essence, whilst not openly endorsing the contributions of women agents, the mail order companies did recognise that women, albeit somewhat surreptitiously, played an important role in popularising their company and indeed the activity of home shopping. Whether Graves had recognised this unofficial role

⁷⁸ Letter from William Kay (6 May, 1912), Quoted in Coopey et al., p. 96.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁸⁰ 'Let's Talk of Graves', p. 29.

⁸¹ Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 101.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

cannot be determined, however his attempts to connect with female customers through the catalogues were abundantly in evidence.⁸⁵ Despite this dichotomy within a few short years women had not only become the main customers of mail order, but the 'trend towards the feminization of mail order agency' had by the 1930s become established amongst the leading mail order giants.⁸⁶ With their own contacts, shared identities, desires and wants, women were always in a prime position to advocate sales and augment the official supplementary income of their husbands. As such, their presence both in the workplace and in their local communities positioned them just as favourably to act as mail order agents as their male counterparts.

Agents, Advocates and the Development of Consumption Communities

Despite the easier remits of Graves' agents, all of the mail order firms required their agents to secure the custom of their family, work colleagues, friends and neighbours. They had to promote sales, reassure consumers of their respective company's integrity and act to popularise the practice of home shopping. While agents had to have a modicum of 'business ability' and demonstrate a capacity to be 'pushful and energetic', they also had to be honest, reliable and respectable.⁸⁷ The same characteristics were also sought from customers. They had to be willing to purchase on a regular basis and meet their payments on time. Sourcing the wrong agent with the wrong contacts and particularly poor or late payers could lead any one of these firms down a worrying financial road. Essentially the relationship and indeed the social identity shared between agent and contact was crucial to the firm's popularity and success. Kay, keen to firmly establish his stance on the issue of poor payers issued specific guidelines to both agents and travellers. Poor payers not only reflected badly on the firm and the agent, but also suggested Kay, upon the wider community. Kay's business records circa 1930 note the rate of poor payers in a series of North Derbyshire villages including Dronfield and the mining communities of Pinxton, Staveley, Poolsbrook and South Normanton.⁸⁸ The Old Post Office yard in South Normanton, regarded by Kay as an area of 'rough and poor class', were communities where agents

⁸⁵ For wider discussion on women as consumers and the firm of J. G. Graves, see chapter four: Mail Order and Gendered Representations.

⁸⁶ Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 111.

⁸⁷ Instructions for training agents, letter to travellers from W. K. Kay (December 24th, 1912). Parcel 3, 3.970.51:720/BA5946/3, W. A.

⁸⁸ Business Documents, Kays Mail Order Company, 970.51:720/5946/2. Entry No. 10. W. A.

should remain particularly suspicious of their clientele.⁸⁹ Similarly the agents in Poolsbrook, an area listed by the firm as ‘the worst place in Derbyshire’ and described as ‘a bad hole’, were instructed that ‘no [further] orders should be taken’.⁹⁰ Those customers failing to make their weekly payments and deemed un-creditworthy were entered onto a blacklist and retained by the company for future reference.⁹¹ Despite such concerns over bad payers and un-creditworthy customers, the companies of Kay’s, Graves and the Fattorinis continued to grow and all of the businessmen appeared to attract customers across Britain. As noted in Kay’s business records, the firm secured agents and travellers from Anglesey and Monmouth in the west to Inverness in the north and Somerset in the south.⁹² While Kay suggested in 1914 that the employment and securement of agents and travellers was somewhat of ‘an expensive experiment’, their infiltration into the workplace and the houses of friends and neighbours continued to secure viable sales and profits for the companies.⁹³

While the agent had to learn the art of persuasive sales rhetoric they were ostensibly already placed in an enviable position compared to the shop worker. Acting as a surrogate form of sales worker they already had the advantages of social familiarity and shared identity with their contacts. As Coopey et al suggest, they also offered a ‘degree of congeniality’ to this new shopping experience.⁹⁴ In the early 1900s, Graves’ firm recognised this growing relationship between consumer communities, social identity and the popularisation of early mail order. Observing the contributions the agents had already made to the firm’s profits and popularity, it suggested that their presence, a necessary operational adjunct, was able to seek out ‘every household who [could] be induced to give [this retailing] system [their] fair consideration’.⁹⁵ For Kay, encouraging this fair consideration meant engaging in programmes of one-to-one sales chat. Influencing customers’ choices through a programme of interactive dialogue and conviviality was essential for the Worcester based firm. Requesting his agents ‘commence talking about the agency directly upon [their] appointment’, demonstrate initiative and ‘set about showing the catalogues

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Kays Business Records list of un-credit worthy customers. 970.51:720/5946/2. Entry No. 10. Worcester Archives.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Kay’s business records (February 2, 1914), 3.970.51:720/BA5946/3. Worcester Archives.

⁹⁴ Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 3.

⁹⁵ ‘Let’s talk of Graves.’ p. 28.

and samples to everyone they know' were clear directives issued by the businessman.⁹⁶ They should, insisted Kay, take every opportunity to visit friends' homes, 'look around, make suggestions' and 'if wise leave the catalogues with customers for the evening'.⁹⁷ Certainly for Kay, the agent's integral role was to directly engage with customers and initiate promptings and propositions.⁹⁸ Leaving the catalogues for later perusal and pondering over was also an important strategy, one that gave them time to consider their desires and discover, as yet, their unknown ones. Graves certainly grasped the value of this marketing strategy. Once his firm's agents had introduced customers to the practice of home shopping, the catalogues then formed the mainstay of future sales by continuing their attempts to whet the consumer's appetite.

For the Fattorinis, agency recruitment led to an explosion of agents and representatives in the north of the country. According to one oral source, not only was Bradford filled with agents, but also every nearby factory, 'mill and workroom'.⁹⁹ Beaver suggests that the Fattorini's move into mail order changed the company's clientele, from the more prosperous consumer audience associated with their early trading days as jewellers to the working classes who although had smaller incomes still sought new opportunities to consume.¹⁰⁰ However while Beaver argues the main reason for the firm's changing consumer audience lay in its creation of an open credit system (which was certainly an enticement), the marketing force of agents with their social connectivity also played a significant part.¹⁰¹

Boorstin, writing about the development of consumer culture in America argues that the twentieth century witnessed the formation of 'consumption communities'.¹⁰² This formation, he goes on to argue, became a 'principal force for social cohesion'.¹⁰³ While Boorstin's argument does not refer to the practices of mail order or the use of agents and

⁹⁶ Instructions by W. K. Kay to travellers on the training of agents (20th January, 1909), No. Viii 8, 1909-1934, Parcel 2. 970.51:720/5946/2, W. A.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ For an interesting insight into the persuasive rhetoric of the mail order agent see: 'Agent in the House' *The Times* (April 3rd, 1961), p. 11. Issue 55045.

⁹⁹ Beaver, *A Pedlar's Legacy*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁰² Daniel Boorstin 'Origins of the Consumer Culture', in Leiss et al., *Social Communication in Advertising*, p. 59. See also Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York).

¹⁰³ Boorstin, 'Origins of the Consumer Culture' p. 59.

advocates, his observations hold significant relevance concerning the early activities of British mail order. Agents actively engaged in sales programmes and operating within their own communities they shared a mutual recognition of consumer habits, income, needs, desires and wants. While these were all traits that complimented the formation of consumption communities, contributing to this formation were the efforts and propositions continually being reinforced by Britain's leading mail order entrepreneurs. While Graves suggested that agencies were fast becoming a 'national institution', Kay argued that the mail order sector ensured good quality goods were now 'within reach of everyone'.¹⁰⁴ As Coopey et al's evaluation of mail order suggests, as 'economic conditions at the end of the nineteenth century [became more] favourable' the working classes could now seek to 'make their homes more comfortable and their lives more enjoyable'.¹⁰⁵ The determined efforts of these businessmen, with their keen sales techniques, their recognition of a target audience, and their awareness of Britain's changing economic and social landscape, proved profitable for their companies. A similar argument is acknowledged by Beaver and Hobsbawm. It was, suggested Hobsbawm, 'the rare dynamic entrepreneurs of Edwardian Britain [who] understood - the massive social changes' and who saw those changes as a 'new opportunity for distributors'.¹⁰⁶ Mail Order, Hobsbawm went on to suggest, was one such retailing organisation that played its part in the 'transformation of [the] distributive system'.¹⁰⁷ However that transformation of the distribution system was essentially worthless unless sales were generated. Those sales were augmented by the productivity of catalogues, agents and advocates, the latter two of which successfully engaged in their roles as sale advocates through their social connectivity and it was that connectivity that contributed to the development of consumer communities.

Unlike his competitors, William Kilbourne Kay and the Fattorinis, Graves chose to abandon the agency system of mail order in favour of direct customer sales. This business decision, made in the early 1900s was as a result, suggested William Kay, of poor management practices, and particularly those related to the recruitment of agents. Kay, heavily criticising

¹⁰⁴ *Review of Reviews* (November, 1903), p. 539. Instructions by W. K. Kay to travellers on the training of agents. (20th January, 1909). Entry No. Viii 8, 1909-1934, Parcel 2. 970.51:720/5946/2. W.A.

¹⁰⁵ Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁶ Eric Hobsbawm cited in Beaver, *A Pedlar's Legacy*, p. 50. See also: Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (London, 1963).

¹⁰⁷ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire. 1875-1914* (London, 1989), p. 203.

his northern competitor, suggested that he 'did not want to throw the agency about for Jack, Tom or Harry in the manner that [had been] done by [the] Sheffield firm'.¹⁰⁸ According to Kay, Graves had 'found...trouble,' because he had appointed several agents living in the same streets, a practice suggested Kay that had 'naturally brought about disaster'.¹⁰⁹ This accusation that the firm of Graves was being somewhat laissez faire in its approach to agent recruitment may have held some validity. However, the recruitment campaigns of both Kays and the Fattorinis had also targeted whole communities, as Beaver's analysis of Empire Stores has demonstrated. Arguably, such national recruiting policies would have seen several agents occupying the same locality and possibly sharing the same contacts. While Kay's accusations have to be treated with a degree of scepticism, Coopey et al note that cash flow problems may have impacted upon the company's decision to 'abandon agency mail order altogether' after 1905.¹¹⁰ However the primary evidence suggests that the financial difficulties experienced by Graves were not due to agents and their recruitment but to an over-production in manufacturing. In 1906, the company was floated on the stock market with shares sold for two shillings and sixpence on application and seven shillings and sixpence on allotment.¹¹¹ *The Financial Times* reported that the company's profits had been 'adversely affected by an exceptional loss [caused] by experimental furniture manufacturing'.¹¹² Nevertheless, prospective shareholders were assured that the company's manufacturing activity had now 'been discontinued'.¹¹³ The move into manufacturing and particularly furniture production seems the more likely reason why the company had run into financial difficulties rather than poor judgement over its recruitment of agents.

The move from agency to direct sales did not appear to make a significant impact upon the company's profitability and it continued to trade, augment its customer numbers and ingratiate its clientele through the medium of the mail order catalogue. Indeed its floatation on the stock exchange gave clear indications of its rapid growth. In 1906, the *Financial Times* reported the firm of J. G. Graves had established a series of depots and warehouses across

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Kay to Travellers (May 6, 1912). 3.970.51/BA5946/3, W. A.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Coopey et al, *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, pp. 21-22.

¹¹¹ *The Financial Times* (May 16, 1906).

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.* Note: Having received his Cutler's license in 1903, Graves did continue to manufacture cutlery, edge tools and gardening implements.

the country.¹¹⁴ Cities including London, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Nottingham, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Hull, Newcastle, Gateshead, Stockton, Leicester and Birmingham all had depots attached to the Sheffield firm.¹¹⁵ Their establishments made good business sense, cutting the costs of transportation, enabling efficient distribution and providing wider employment opportunities across the country.

Graves' decision to concentrate mainly on direct customer sales rather than a club or agency system was certainly not one shared by his business contemporaries. However, the Sheffield firm did periodically re-appraise its marketing programme and certainly in the 1960s a programme of 'inertia selling' (canvassers and collector salesmen knocking on doors) was being encouraged.¹¹⁶ This was almost a return to the agent/traveller initiative, an agenda that Graves had only really dabbled with during his early days of trading. However despite adopting these sales techniques the firm entered into a programme of voluntary liquidation and was eventually absorbed into the Sheffield Electrical firm of Henry Wigfall's in 1966.¹¹⁷ By the 1970s, the company of J. G. Graves along with Wigfalls had both been absorbed into the large Manchester based mail order giant, Great Universal Stores. Interestingly Great Universal's recognition and recruitment of women agents since the 1930s had played a significant role in securing that firm's future.¹¹⁸

In summary, promoting the concept and practice of mail order required the adoption of an innovative marketing strategy. The early mail order entrepreneurs accomplished this through the use of both human capital (in the form of agents, travellers and advocates) and through the use of primary and secondary advertising. By giving the catalogues the appeal and appearance of a magazine or journal, companies such as Graves were able to promote both the commodity and the concept of home shopping. By adopting an ingratiating and enticing format through the systematic inclusion of supplementary articles and testimonials, Graves' firm was also able to overcome the missing social interaction associated with shop and counter staff. The catalogues afforded Graves an ability to connect with customers

¹¹⁴ *The Financial Times* (May 16, 1906).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Oral Interviews: Ted Needham, Company Secretary, 1961-1968, Eric Twigg, Customer Services Manager, 1964-1966, David Murray, Warehouse Manager, 1960-1966.

¹¹⁷ Annual Statement of Henry Wigfall Limited. *The Financial Times* (December 8, 1967), p. 4. See also: Geoffrey Bailey, 'All This from Five Shillings Down', *Sheffield History Reporter Annual* (1998), SLSL.

¹¹⁸ Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, pp. 98-99.

through a surrogate form of communication, establish the firm's reputation and develop an atmosphere of a community of shoppers. For Graves, the presentation of the firm as a modern, forward thinking and progressive enterprise was all important because it was used to build the reputation of the company.

The employment of salaried travellers and commissioned agents proved a vital addition to the marketing programmes of early mail order. By infiltrating workplaces and the social environments of the working classes, the entrepreneurs were able to exploit the market and popularise their retailing activities. It was the adoption of such initiatives and the symbiotic roles played by both human capital and the production of innovative and enticing marketing literature that aided the development and success of British mail order. Although the Sheffield firm only relied upon the use of agents for a short period of time, sourcing those agents from large working class communities such as coal mines and factories was a good business strategy. Acting as advocate and agent and with ready access to colleagues, family, friends and neighbours, their role as salesmen was easily identifiable. Their tasks - to generate sales, promote the concept of mail order shopping and endorse the respectability of their firms were rewarded in the form of commission payments for agents and salaries for travellers. The key to the firms' early success lay in the abilities and capabilities of their agents to coherently and consistently connect and sell to their communities. Essentially the firms tapped into the wealth of pre-established social allegiances and utilised those allegiances in a sustained, engineered and structured marketing initiative. Living and working alongside each other, the agents and their customers shared a social identity and that identity included recognisable needs, desires and wants. This recognition formed the reference point for the appointment of agents and the instigator for sales. While the remits of the commissioned agents varied according to their employer's directions, all of the agents played a fundamental role in the progression and profits of their respective companies. In addition the appointment of agents also served to swell the ranks of the penny capitalists and programmes of parlour capitalism. While the desire to supplement their incomes enabled them to gain a greater degree of control over their own domestic finances, for the firm of J. G. Graves such appointments both aligned and engaged with programmes of social betterment.

While most mail order companies dragged their heels over the recruitment of women agents and while Coopey suggests the introduction of the Married Women and Tortfeasers Act finally stimulated a growth in their recruitment, women's capacity to act as unofficial agents had been recognised for some time. The women it appears did not choose to wait until the Act's introduction in 1935 to exert their influence upon this aspect of supplementary work. Parlour shopping and its use of the domestic space along with the women's own working environments could be used just as effectively to generate sales as the factory, the pithead and the public houses inhabited by men. By encouraging family members, neighbours, friends and work colleagues to participate in this consumer activity, the women acting as unofficial agents applied the same degree of social affiliation, recognition and congeniality to their sales efforts as their male counterparts. In this respect, mail order offered the comfort and convenience of home shopping, profited from shared identities and contributed to the development of consumption communities. The difference with the agent and the catalogue was that whilst the former already had the foundations of a consumption community, the catalogue had to nurture and develop it. However this did not appear to present an insurmountable problem for businessmen such as Graves who had chosen to walk away from an agency led enterprise. Indeed the compilation of the catalogues did provide the company with its own department store between book covers. That 'store', as the next chapters will demonstrate, continued to vie for its custom through enticing sales agendas and programmes of retailer/consumer interaction.

Chapter Three

Captivating an Audience

By the early 1900s, the firm of J. G. Graves had firmly established its position in the retailing market and was serving the needs of a large and diverse audience of consumers. Enabled through its programme of bulk buying, securement of depots and its mass production and circulation of catalogues, the firm offered choice, convenience and a respectable form of credit. From the comfort of their own armchairs, customers were invited to leaf through the pages of the catalogues and engage with a wealth of persuasive advertising rhetoric, enticing imagery and informative advice columns. Designed to whet the appetite and secure sales, the marketing narratives either sought to fulfil the basic needs and wants of customers or encouraged them to dream, aspire and pursue a lifestyle; one that signalled social advancement and achievement. This chapter will explore how the firm of J. G. Graves attempted to captivate and maintain the attention of consumers, how it married the firm's programme of sales to an ideology of self-betterment and the pursuit of respectability and how it sought to retain its popularity by promoting both the tangible and the intangible products of consumption. It will begin by exploring the company's credit scheme and evaluate how Graves' credit programme fitted in with other contemporary credit systems and programmes. It will discuss how the firm attempted to address the concerns and dichotomies of credit, how it sought to reassure customers that payment by instalments was respectable and how the scheme promoted an alternative yet reputable programme of consumption.

The chapter will then explore how Graves attached the sale of commodities to programmes of labour, self-betterment and respectability. It will evaluate the firm's use of advertising rhetoric and narrative and examine how it used a series of advertising codes, hooks and triggers to capture the attention of consumers. The chapter will also discuss how Graves used his marketing material to promote his own personally held values and beliefs, and particularly those related to a Smilesean ideology. It will explore how the firm's marketing literature interconnected its sales of commodities with a Smilesean philosophy and how such commodities were subsequently attached to programmes of self-betterment, personal growth and prospects of economic security.

Finally the chapter will examine how the firm interconnected and interacted with the rise of suburbia and suburbia's association with the lower middle classes. It will analyse how the suburban lifestyle fitted into the retailing programmes of J. G. Graves and how the firm attempted to attract the attention of such consumers. It will discuss their needs, wants and desires and the dilemmas of those who sought to pursue a respectable lifestyle through practices of consumption. It will evaluate the relationship between that lifestyle and consumer activities and explore how J. G. Graves interacted and positioned his business to reflect and accommodate those desires. Drawing on the contributions of advertising analysts, linguists, socio-cultural historians and marketing theorists, this chapter will argue that there existed a co-operative venture between the firm and its customers and which proved to be mutually advantageous to both parties.

A Business of Mail Order: J. G. Graves Credit and Consumption

Obtaining credit was often a necessary undertaking for the working and lower middle classes whose incomes were low or sporadic. Credit also benefitted the trader and some of the earliest credit institutions such as pawn brokers, money lenders, tallymen and small shop keepers offering items on tick and hire purchase were already popular outlets on the High Street when Graves was establishing his business. However while credit provided an 'ability for working class families to make ends meet and helped middle-class families on limited incomes to set up households,' it also had its controversies.¹ As Taylor argues, credit 'involved a potential loss of respectability and status'.² However the loss of respectability was less to do with the obtainment of credit and more to do with the credit's intended use; for example the purchase of luxury goods or the provision of basic needs.³ As O'Connell notes 'the piano bought through hire purchase by the respectable working-class family was perceived more positively than the boots bought through a moneylender's loan by an

¹ Erica Rappaport, 'A Husband and his wife's dresses: Consumer Credit and the Debtor Family in England, 1864-1914' in Victoria De Grazia & Ellen Furlough, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (London, 1996), p. 167.

² Avram Taylor cited in Richard Coopey et al. *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 77. See also: Avram Taylor, *Working Class Credit and Community since 1918* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 2.

³ Johnson in O'Connell, *Credit, Community and working-Class Debt in the UK*, p. 11. See also: Johnson 'Credit and thrift' in Winter (ed.), *The Working Class in Modern British History*, p. 153.

unskilled worker's wife'.⁴ Credit, it appears, was both complex and contradictory and brought with it a wealth of social connotations and economic implications.

While Graves clearly understood his programme of credit was a valuable customer incentive, he also understood the social dilemmas that pervaded the issue. Having accrued some knowledge of credit's potential through the sales of pocket watches, Graves was becoming well-versed in the social connotations of credit and particularly those connotations associated with the working classes. Their experiences of obtaining credit, whether due to low or sporadic incomes, were imbued with these negative meanings regardless of whether it was used to sustain their daily needs or to alleviate a brief period of economic uncertainty. Offering customers the choice to pay via instalments (which was essentially an offshoot of the watch clubs but with the added bonus of immediate gratification) had already proven advantageous for Graves' fledgling business. In addition the scheme had navigated the negative implications of credit and distanced itself from any association with the tallymen and dubious high street lenders. As a small jewellery retailer Graves had recognised that while items such as pocket watches were sought after, they could only be realistically popularised with a working class audience if they came with the added incentive of an alternative, viable and respectable payment plan. Applying this credit plan had generated consumer interest, proved profitable for the small time retailer and fired his determination to extend his enterprise and pursue the business of large scale mail order. Encouraged to expand his operation, augment consumer opportunities and simultaneously attach a respectable programme of credit was both an opportunistic and bold business move.

For new customers of Graves, the first payment of one eighth of the value of the goods was generally required with the first order, followed by eight or nine monthly instalments.⁵ Once customers had secured the confidence of the firm through their prompt payments, they were then free to make further purchases without the need for an initial up-front payment. Furthermore, having disposed of the agents once responsible for generating reliable custom, new customers were requested to complete a brief questionnaire requesting

⁴ O'Connell, *Credit and Community*, pp. 11-12.

⁵ The monthly payments varied but generally they were either eight or nine months. For a selection of examples, see: J. G. Graves, Receipts and Adverts, 658.872SSTQ SLSL and the catalogues of J. G. Graves, boxes 1-4. 659.133 SSTF SLSL.

information such as home-owner or tenant, occupation and length of employment, the details of which appeared to provide enough information for the firm to consider their application.⁶ While underpinned by the firm's need to generate sales, the simple and understated application forms were also an attempt by Graves to dispel any perceived association with credit's social inequalities. When interviewed in 1903, Graves reinforced his confidence in the scheme and in his customers stating 'he believed English men and women were honest and deserved to be trusted' and indeed 'if confidence was placed in them they would prove themselves not unworthy of [that] trust'.⁷ When questioned about concerns over non-payment and defaults, Graves restated that 'where there is a default it is far more frequently due to negligence than any dishonest intent'.⁸ Graves understood the need to develop a relationship between retailer and customer and that relationship had to legitimise the business, the deferred payment scheme and the customer accessing it. Legitimising the purchasing habits of the firm's customers went hand in glove with legitimising the credit programme; indeed the two were inseparable. Effectively the customer, the business operation and any negative social connotations of credit had to be dispelled. Adopting a morally attuned narrative and reiterating his trust in the customer was essentially a business statement seeking to reinforce the respectability of the firm's operations; once cemented, its profits and popularity could grow.

While Rappaport suggests that 'credit such as the instalment plan' made great contributions to the 'expansion of consumer society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', Coopey et al argue that 'mail order became one of the most important sources of credit available to working-class consumers'.⁹ For Graves, the success of the instalment plan was crucial to securing the firm's future and reassuring customers that paying via instalments did not compromise the cost or accrue interest provided further encouragement to consume. Simplicity in transactions was also important for both the firm and the consumer and once the customer had placed their order and made their initial payment, the firm issued a simple payment card with details of their purchase, their payments and any outstanding

⁶ While early examples of these questionnaires no longer exist there are some originals that date from the 1960s. See Box 5, 659.133SSTF, SLSL. There is no evidence to suggest the request of references.

⁷ *Review of Reviews* (November 1903), p. 535.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 535.

⁹ Rappaport, 'A Husband and his Wife's dresses,' p. 165; Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 78.

balance.¹⁰ While Graves offered a bonus for customers opting to pay the full amount in one transaction (in the shape of goods valued at five per cent of their original price) it was the instalment plan that essentially forged the company forward and popularised its operations to a working class audience.¹¹

Coopey notes that not only did Graves popularise the instalment plan but also his retailing competitors seeking 'to compete with his heavily advertised operation found themselves drawn down the same track'.¹² Graves, keen to establish his firm's place in the mail order enterprise, clearly understood the social complexity attached to issues of credit, the consumer's search for immediate gratification and the ability of firms such as his to sustain the appetites of consumers. Graves' heavily advertised operation promoted his business by marrying the activity of consumption (and his programme of credit) to a carefully constructed and socially engineered advertising agenda. In an advertising article (circa 1905) entitled 'A beautiful home at little outlay' the firm sought to capitalise upon sales by dispelling the social and moral disparities associated with credit and the working classes.¹³ Graves, aware of this association, suggested that the man without sufficient capital 'is handicapped by the lack of sufficient ready money [and] instead of his aspirations being turned into realisations he has the cold comfort of merely waiting and hoping for more affluent times'.¹⁴ Reassuring those customers seeking to pay by instalments that they should not 'feel one whit inferior to his contemporaries' he also voiced his concerns that the constant 'absence of capital act[ed] as a drag on ambitions and [a] post-poner of a much-desired state of happiness'.¹⁵ While the article was obviously rooted in marketing rhetoric and designed to sell the firm's goods, it also flowed with a wealth of contemporary social and economic conjectures. Consumers were positioned to re-evaluate their needs and desires, query their consumer habits and question their concerns on the subject of credit, including any perceived impact upon their social ranking. As Fraser's evaluation on the interconnectedness of credit and business acumen suggests, the retailing trade 'realise[d]

¹⁰ While evidence of these cards are rare a copy from 1936 highlights their details. The copy also suggests that both male and female customers were accessing the firm's credit programme at this time. A copy of the payment card retrieved through Flickr photo sharing website is the property of Rachael Richardson.

¹¹ *Review of Reviews* (November, 1903), p. 536.

¹² Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 19.

¹³ 'A beautiful Home at little outlay' (circa 1905) *Opportunities*. Box 1, 659.133SSTF. SLSL.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

that they had a function in not only satisfying demand, but also in stimulating it and if necessary, altering taste and fashion'¹⁶ Retailers also realised, suggests Fraser 'that even in the smallest budgets there was an order of priorities which, under sales pressure' or indeed attractive incentives 'could be altered'.¹⁷

For Graves, aligning the activity of consumption to concepts of aspiration and social progression was both profitable for the company and achievable for the consumer. It reassured the consumer that credit neither compromised their status nor signalled any degree of social inferiority. The firm of J. G. Graves advocated both the consumption of credit and its commodities by aligning both with the meanings of social advancement and equality. It reinforced the message that those consumers without access to ready capital deserved to experience a state of comfort and happiness on the same level as those with ready cash in their pocket. Rather than ignore the negatives and the social dilemmas that pervaded the issue of credit, the firm acknowledged their presence and utilised that presence to market its goods. It was a perceptive and sharp use of advertising that married the sale of commodities to the social and moral complexities surrounding the issue of credit and the desires of working class audiences seeking to re-evaluate their lifestyles.

Gelpi and Labruyère argue that credit not only 'made it possible to separate current consumption from current income' but also had an ability 'to blur social distinctions'.¹⁸ That blurring of social distinctions came through the consumption of the tangible commodity, which not only 'improve[d] the well-being of the household [and] standard of living' but also 'increase[d] their [sense of] satisfaction and security'.¹⁹ It was this relationship, the blurring of social distinctions, the role of the commodity and the consumer's ability to engage with and embrace a sense of satisfaction and achievement that the firm of Graves honed in on. By employing a narrative that sanctioned and endorsed the consumption of credit the firm enabled itself to engage with the consumer, ply its trade and endorse its method of retailing. Essentially the firm approached the art of selling by applying an engineered advertising rhetoric; one that congratulated both the retailer and consumer who embraced

¹⁶ W. Hamish Fraser, *The Coming of the Mass Market, 1850-1914* (London, 1981), p. 85.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁸ Rosa-Maria Gelpi & Francois Julien-Labruyère, *The History of Consumer Credit: Doctrines and Practices* (London, 2000) p. 99.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p., 100.

a positive and productive attitude towards the issue of credit. The advertisement was a morally attuned menu and one that befitted an era of retailers vying to promote their goods to those sections of the working class audience seeking respectability through the consumption of both credit and commodity. As Foster points out 'the whole credit system was a pressure on the working-class family [seeking] respectability, [simply] because only the respectable could expect credit'.²⁰

While the use of Graves' marketing narrative adopted both an engaging and edifying tone, it also highlighted the complexity surrounding the issue of credit, and particularly its relationship with gender. Identifying the man as the ultimate pursuer of social betterment, Graves' narrative complied with the gendered social discourses of the period. It was, suggested Graves, 'the man handicapped by the lack of sufficient ready money' whose aspirations had to wait to be 'turned into realisations' and it was 'he' who endured the 'cold comfort of merely waiting and hoping for more affluent times'.²¹ While the commodities on sale through the company's credit programme were aimed at the household, the family, the male and the female consumer, the early advertising literature adhered to an established gendering of narrative that pervaded matters of credit. Women were not only excluded from the narrative but any pursuit of social betterment through the consumption of credit appeared to be reliant upon the aptitude and application of the male householder. Interestingly, Lemire's study of women and credit observes that while the 'virtuous urban housewife' was noted for 'her capacity to employ credit' such capacity was not necessarily reflected in 'prescriptive literature'.²² As argued by Lemire, Pujol and Bodkin, the 'formalisations and regulation of credit were seen as distinctively male prerogatives' as 'most things defined as economic were gendered male'.²³ Consumption may have been all encompassing in bringing succour and comfort to the home, but achieving such through programmes of credit, alluded the firm's article, remained that of the man's domain.²⁴

²⁰ John Foster quoted in Fraser, *The Coming of the Mass Market*, p. 86.

²¹ 'A beautiful Home at little outlay'.

²² Lemire, Pearson & Campbell, *Women and Credit: Researching the Past*, p. 12.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-12. See also: Michele. A. Pujol, *Feminism and Anti-Feminism in Early Economic Thought* (Aldershot, 1992); Ronald, G. Bodkin. 'Economic Thought: Adam Smith, Harriet Taylor Mill and J. S. Mill,' *Feminist Economics*, 5:1 (1999), pp. 45-60.

²⁴ It is worth noting that there is no clear evidence from the firm that only men could apply for credit.

It may have been a man's responsibility to formally apply for credit from banks, building societies and large retailers but women did play a significant role in controlling the household budget and that control often included the productive use of some form of credit. As Roberts and Chinn argues, not only was it often the housewife who 'applied for credit at the local corner shop' but the working class housewife was 'much more likely to be respected and highly regarded as [the] financial and household manager'.²⁵ If applying for credit at the corner shop was already a common practice for the working class woman, then apportioning the spending of credit obtained through a programme of mail order would have presented few anxieties for her. Furthermore while O'Connell suggests mail order 'became the most common form of credit retailing in the twentieth century,' he also argues that 'female consumers proved most lucrative for mail order retailers'.²⁶ If the arguments of O'Connell, Roberts and Chinn are applied in the context of mail order and credit then women were inextricably linked to the consumption of credit, including its method of use and its dispersal. While debates over credit and its relationship to issues of gender, social attainment and retailing have attracted much attention and analysis, the role of mail order, with its alternative credit option, has attracted little scrutiny. Yet it did play a significant role in this complexity of meaning and consumer practices. For Margot Finn, mail order was one area of retailing that 'formalised credit facilities to an ever-expanding population of purchasers'.²⁷ Yet such formalisation appeared slow to formally acknowledge women as consumers of credit. As Finn goes on to point out, 'for married women, the acquisition of full contractual rights and responsibilities had to wait until the interwar years'.²⁸ It was only then, continues Finn, when a 'concatenation of legal and economic shifts in the formal and informal credit regimes' was realised.²⁹ How quickly Graves registered women as main account holders is difficult to determine, however there is evidence to suggest that certainly by 1936 women were holding accounts with the firm.³⁰

²⁵ Roberts and Chinn cited in John Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain*, p. 23. See also Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940* (Blackwell, 1984).

²⁶ O'Connell, *Credit and Community*, pp. 106 & 101.

²⁷ Margot, C. Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 326.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ J. G. Graves' payment card (1935), property of Rachael Richardson.

For consumers seeking either the essential or the luxury, Graves' credit scheme with its respectable ethos provided choice, accessibility and immediate gratification and arguably the contradictions of credit were somewhat alleviated by the activities of such firms as J. G. Graves. Whether customers sought a luxury item such as a piano or a pair of workman's boots was immaterial, the resounding rhetoric of Graves' credit scheme was the reassurance that any negative connotations associated with accessing the firm's credit did not apply to them. Added to and embedded within this reassurance were the overriding semantics that echoed concepts of social inclusion and acceptability; indeed such concepts had to be uniformly present, simply because of the wide range of commodities aimed at a socially diverse consumer audience. While the marketing rhetoric contained within 'A beautiful Home at little outlay' did conform to a gendered outlook, its recognition of men and not women was clearly an adherence to the prescriptive gendered nuances popular at the time. However, certainly by the mid-1930s the firm had recognised that women were not only important consumers of commodities but could also be capable and competent consumers of credit.

While the details of the deferred payment scheme were continually reinforced, regurgitated and re-visited, so was its respectable ethos. The objective of the business was to stimulate consumer desires, and that stimulation relied upon promoting the legitimacy and respectability of credit; a legitimacy and respectability that applied to both the company and the consumer. Filling and spanning the aisles of the catalogues' pages were products ranging from tools for the heavy labourer and artisan to fur coats and gentlemen's suits for the wealthier classes. Whether the theatre-goer was seeking a new set of binoculars, the commuter a new cane or the maid a new mop was irrelevant; what was relevant was the ability of the company to meet a wide range of supply and demand. That breadth of demand meant it could not deviate from its path of an inclusive form of credit. It was a strategy that clearly demonstrated the company's grasp of retailing, marketing and the relationship between consumer practices and the socio-economic dilemmas that pervaded the issue of credit. Having dispelled with such negativities, the firm continued to popularise its retailing agenda and attaching concepts to its range of commodities was one particular advertising tool it sought to capitalise upon.

A Consultant for Personal Growth: Concepts and Consumption

For Graves, captivating an audience not only meant engaging with the skills of marketing and advertising but also using that medium to promote a series of concepts and philosophies, some of which were personally held by the businessman. The early entrepreneurial days of J. G. Graves, whilst teaching him the skills of marketing and finance, had also taught him the benefits of hard-work, self-discipline and personal application. Such practices for Graves began in the labour market where labour, thrift, diligence and perseverance produced good character and cemented the roots of ambition and self-betterment. It was also these qualities that Graves would seek to attach to the sale of commodities aimed at the working-class man, labourer and artisan. These characteristics and practices, aimed to encourage personal growth, had been entrenched in John Graves through his association with the YMCA and his introduction to the works of Scottish author and social thinker, Samuel Smiles.³¹ Graves had become fascinated by the philosophies and practices of this retired medical practitioner and political thinker who in 1859 had published his second book, *Self-Help*.³² Designed to inspire the working classes, Samuel Smiles had compiled a list of hard-working individuals who had secured their economic future and civic popularity through programmes of hard work and diligence. Not only did the book promote the obtainability of social betterment for the working classes, but it also suggested that such achievements could be secured through programmes of self-help. However, the programmes did not just revolve around showing the initiatives of independence and individual efforts but be aided through the contributions of modern employers, educational facilities and advocates for social progression. For Smiles this meant free and easy access to local civic facilities, including public libraries, educational programmes, museums and centres of learning.³³ Heralding the efforts and achievements of successful industrialists, scientists, artists and poets, including James Watt, Richard Arkwright, Josiah Wedgwood, Isaac Newton, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Joshua Reynolds, and Richard Hogarth, Smiles advocated the possibilities to be gained for the hard-working man who was supported by programmes of education and enlightenment. Indeed 'one of the most strongly-marked features of the English people is their spirit of industry' argued Smiles; a spirit which not

³¹ J. G. Graves, 'Some Memories.' pp. 39-43.

³² Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (1859).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. X.

only stands 'out prominent and distinct in their past history' but remains 'strikingly characteristic of them now'.³⁴

For Graves, this Smilesean philosophy became one of both personal reflection and a national priority. If such philosophies and practices needed a platform, then Graves not only had it but was prepared to use it. The result of this saw the ideology eagerly absorbed into the advertising rhetoric of the company's catalogues and later throughout the businessman's welfare and civic activities in Sheffield. With kits readily and cheaply available for plumbers, plasterers, gardeners, decorators, joiners, chimney sweeps and electricians, the company's advertising rhetoric suggested the British workmen had 'no excuse for lowering their wage-earning power through the use of inferior tools'.³⁵ Offering the tools for sale through the firm's 'easy payment system' the narrative went on to allude to the Smilesean philosophy by suggesting that the quality of their workmanship would not only benefit their income but would prove to 'uphold [his] character'.³⁶ This character was not just about the work but also about the workman. He was British, he both engaged in and embraced hard work and he applied his skills with determination, purpose and pride.

The rhetoric contained within Graves' advertising literature with its subtle attachment of philosophical narrative reinforces the later observations of advertising analyst John Sinclair and cultural historian Raymond Williams. Williams argues that advertising has the capacity to 'mime the language of a working-class culture' enabling it to give an appearance that it is 'speak[ing] to workers from their own position in society and represent[ing] their own interests'.³⁷ Sinclair elaborates further on this argument, suggesting that 'dominant commercial forces...construct groups into markets of consumers who are addressed according to their demographic characteristics'.³⁸ This grouping, continues Sinclair, 'selectively incorporates [the groups] cultural characteristics into messages [which then]

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³⁵ 'Let's talk of Graves', p. 18. By 1902 the firm having established its own manufacturing department was making a variety of tools for the British workman, artisan, hobbyist and apprentices. See also *Directory of Sheffield* (1902). For a broader analysis on the advertising of tools and its relationship to male customers see chapter on gender. SLSL.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁷ Raymond Williams cited in John Sinclair, *Images Incorporated: Advertising as Industry and Ideology* (London, 1987), p. 38.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

invite[s] them to identify with a commercialised image of themselves'.³⁹ While Sinclair goes on to argue that not all will 'necessarily be taken in by this appearance' there is evidence to suggest that attempts at this marketing manipulation did appear in the advertising practices of J. G. Graves.⁴⁰ However, Graves' marketing manipulation was not as simplistic as it may first appear. Wrapping the sale of the product in a narrative that spoke of its quality, value and affordability was one thing, but aligning the tools with a social message that narrated meanings of success and echoed with the concepts of good character was another.⁴¹ This 'upholding of character' and 'no excuse for lowering wage-earning power' did not simply revolve around the quality and the durability of the commodity but the quality and durability of the working man. While the firm was the enabler and the commodity the assistant, the ultimate engineer of the working man's integrity, destiny and economic security was down to his own application and self-determination. However that application and determination, alluded Graves, could be assisted by the quality of the tools he used. Indeed he no longer had to find life a handicap through the lack of ready capital, the use of inferior tools or the lowering of his character. Far from just presenting a commercialised image of workers to identify with, the advertising narrative supplied and indeed invited these potential consumers to embrace a message of empowerment. While the discourse was emancipating in tone (suggesting an opportunity to achieve financial security through work) it also hinted at the benefits of applying the Smilesean principles to the practice of labour. In 1859, Samuel Smiles had suggested that the labour force, as 'cultivators of the soil, producers of articles of utility [or] contrivers of tools and machines [were] the vital principle of the nation'.⁴² They were also, suggested Smiles a national 'blessing'.⁴³ With the mass production and distribution of the mail order catalogues, Graves was enabled to popularise this message by attaching it to his sale of commodities and ultimately consumer activity and culture. Promoted through the inclusion of salient and poignant messages, the catalogues became a medium and vehicle to educate, inform, suggest and convey this series of sentiments, values and ideologies. They also provided a platform for Graves to connect

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ While the firm of Graves enjoyed its own advertising department, Graves' personal involvement in the production of the marketing material is difficult to determine. However his interest in the Smilesean philosophy was certainly documented in his memoirs and other material. See: J. G. Graves. 'Some Memories', pp. 39-44.

⁴² Smiles, *Self-Help*, p. 37.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

with his customers and promote his own personally held sentiments and values. Furthermore, neither was such promotional rhetoric confined to his marketing material.

When in 1926 Graves' name appeared in an edition of a Sheffield newspaper as the 'Apostle of Self Help', he was being acknowledged for his services to the local community and his own success in business.⁴⁴ Yet it was his business that had provided Graves with his first platform upon which to echo his own sentiments and allegiances. In the early 1900s the firm promoted the Smilesean self-help philosophy by inviting customers to participate in an essay-writing competition, the subject of which was self-help. Graves' response to the submissions came in the form of a further article entitled 'He's a Trier'.⁴⁵ While acknowledging the readers' submissions, Graves also used the article to admonish a culture of idleness, reprimand those who shied away from attempts of self-betterment and criticised those he viewed as the dreaming leisure classes.⁴⁶ 'The necessity, the value, the morality of trying is clear [and] the difficulty of a task should never be made the excuse for want of effort to overcome it'.⁴⁷ Indeed, suggested Graves, 'every man is genius enough to try' and the working man should 'consider nothing an impossibility'.⁴⁸ With the Smilesean philosophy reverberating throughout the address, Graves argued that 'men who have succeeded were men who were always trying [and] realising that attempt was the stepping stone to accomplishment'.⁴⁹ As the businessman praised the winner of the essay-writing competition, he not only hammered home his point through a series of encouraging words for the working-class man but also included a selection of cryptic criticisms for the ranks of those he had termed the dreaming leisure classes. Encouraging the working classes to adopt the virtues of hard work and self-help, Graves argued that it was the 'ordinary-minded working man who tries [and] wills [and whose will] stands a stronger chance of succeeding in life's battles than the idle-minded genius who dreams'.⁵⁰ The readers of Graves' response would have been left in little doubt of the businessman's allegiance to the Smilesean doctrine; a doctrine that had been fed and weaved into a menu of social discourse since the

⁴⁴ *Yorkshire Telegraph and Star* (9 November, 1926).

⁴⁵ 'He's a Trier. *Opportunities*, circa 1910. Box 1, 659.133SSTF. SLS. Unfortunately the only evidence remaining from this competition is an address written by Graves after the judging had been made.

⁴⁶ Graves does not elaborate on his definition of the 'dreaming leisure classes' but his advocacy of hard-work and self-discipline was aimed at those who did not benefit from an inherited income.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

publication of *Self-help* in 1859. This was a book, suggests Perry, that had not only 'become an instant success', but its philosophising narrative, Grigg argues, had 'in some degree influenced all British working men, even those who were demonstrably unequal to the task of helping themselves'.⁵¹

For Graves, embracing and applying the Smilesean philosophy was both a personal route to success and a personal quest to extend its message to a national albeit male audience. It was a determining force that upheld values and signalled the embracement of good character; a character cemented and couched within a thematic rhetoric of self-help and personal application. Relevant to the activities of J. G. Graves, Geoffrey Best notes that many of the main protagonists of self-help were often 'self-appointed spokesmen of the working classes'.⁵² While citing such advocates as William Lovett, a self-educated cabinet maker and early Chartist, and Thomas Cooper, a shoe maker's apprentice, self-educated schoolmaster and later leader of the Chartist movement, Best also suggests that the activities of such early protagonists appeared to fade later in the century.⁵³ Yet the evidence of Graves suggests otherwise. In similar fashion to Lovett and Cooper, Graves not only sanctified and echoed his own allegiance to the philosophy but used the civic and retailing platforms to promote its wider adoption. Clearly advocating his own adoption as a self-appointed spokesman, the activities of Graves confirms that not only were the Smilesean values just as eagerly promoted from below as they were from above, but they remained a significant part of social discourse during the early 1900s. While for Graves, the Smilesean philosophy performed an integral role in the construct of Britishness, he also recognised that 'Britishness', both as a term and as an identity, held significant marketing value. It was this recognition and his willingness to invest in a programme of symbiotic marketing techniques that also sought to captivate his audience of consumers.

Captivating an Audience: An Object Lesson of Britishness

The advertising analyst Vance Packard suggests that the use of hooks, codes, triggers and emotional tugs was a tool readily used by advertisers to draw consumers into the prospect

⁵¹ Marvin Perry, *An Intellectual History of Modern Europe* (Boston, 1992), p. 274; Grigg, *Lloyd George: The People's Champion*, p. 347.

⁵² Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851-75* (London, 1985), p. 281.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

of buying.⁵⁴ This use of advertising language argues Packard, could connote a wealth of meanings, from the tangible - for example, domesticated, clean and philanthropic - to the intangible - sincere, honest, courteous and sympathetic.⁵⁵ This attachment of a self-perceived image or 'emotional tug' became a recognised marketing tool used by producers and retailers seeking to stimulate mass sales and augment their profits.⁵⁶ While Packard's theory of psychological manipulation and subliminal messaging has attracted criticism (arguably because of its abstract nature and lack of evidence), Leiss acknowledging this analysis does suggest Packard's arguments did pave the way for further exploration into the practice of 'motivational' advertising techniques.⁵⁷ Graves' company did apply a series of emotional tugs to its advertising agenda and its use of codes, hooks and triggers often complied with a constructed concept of Britishness. For Graves 'Britishness' appeared to provide the emotional tug necessary to connect commodities with an identity; both emotive and enticing 'Britishness' echoed with concepts of fortitude, resilience and authority and was inextricably bound to ideologies of loyalty, allegiance and patriotism. In terms of its marketing value the expression of 'British' or 'Britishness' was the semantic equivalent of a voluble statement; stimulating, suggestive, descriptive and evocative. It also lent itself to the use of popular images, caricatures and illustrations, all of which were important tools for advertisers seeking to reinforce meaning. In 1905 the company's attempts to sell a range of its Express Lever pocket watches used images of the British Bulldog (figure 11).⁵⁸ Representing stamina and fortitude, the well-known caricature had been aligned with a British identity long before its now



Figure 11. *Opportunities* (June, 1905). Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. 659.133SSTF, Box 4.

⁵⁴ Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*, p. 47.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Leiss, Kline & Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising*, pp. 22-23.

⁵⁸ Figure, 11. *Opportunities*, No, 32, June, 1905, p.26. Box 4, 659.133SSTF. SLSL. Further use of the Bulldog image can be seen in a selection of classified advertisements, for example see: *North Devon Journal*, May 9th 1901, p. 2.

more common association with the Second World War and images of Winston Churchill.⁵⁹ The advertisement seeking to reinforce that interconnectedness between commodity and constructed identity was further strengthened by the use of repetitive terminology. Referring to the term 'British' and 'Britishness' six times within nine lines of text was a clear demonstration of the firm attaching emotive tugs to commodities. Such evidence aligns with the later arguments of Leiss et al who suggests that the use of layers of symbolic meanings and messages implied through text and images are not only placed to fit 'snugly and comfortably' to form a 'natural part of [the consumers] being' but also serve to change the 'social function of goods from being primarily satisfiers of want, to being communicators of meaning'.⁶⁰

Undoubtedly the firm understood the commodity's ability to communicate meaning and certainly those meanings couched in ideological values and identities steeped in concepts of heritage, legacies, customs and conventions. Other images used by the firm included caricatures of the Lion, images of Britannia, portrayals of the British military and pictures of Royalty. While in 1897-8 Graves used images of Britannia, resplendently sporting her Corinthian helmet, trident and shield and connoting messages of control and command (figure 12) the catalogues of the early 1900s presented consumers with the pomp and circumstance of Britain's royal heritage (figure 13).



Figure 12. J. G. Graves Receipts & Adverts, (1897-1898). Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. 658.872SSTQ



Figure 13. *Opportunities* (circa 1930). Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. Box 2 659.133SSTF

⁵⁹ George, R. Jesse noted in 1866 that the Bulldog had become a popular breed for the wealthy families of Britain seeking hunting dogs. *Researches into the history of the British Dog, from ancient laws, charters, and historical records* (Bavarian State Library), p. 306.

⁶⁰ Leiss et al., *Social Communication in Advertising*, p. 285.

Whether rooted in a mythically perceived British identity or aligned with the more tangible facets of Britishness, the company chose images to project the familiar and recognisable and married its commodities to features that had helped shape and cement the construction of identity.⁶¹ They reverberated, reinforced and echoed with meanings of Britishness; what it was to be British, what it meant to be British, how Britishness should be perceived and portrayed. In essence the marketing material demonstrated how the commodities might be indelibly linked to fit in with and form, as Leiss et al suggests, a comfortable and natural part of the consumer's being. While such attention to advertising's detail was evident in the literature of Graves, it was nothing new. The custom of 'puffery' or 'puffing up' commodities by attaching personified identities or embroidering a product's qualities had been common practice amongst advertisers since the eighteenth century.⁶² What was new in the case of Graves was the mass circulation of the mail order catalogues entering directly into the consumers' homes and providing a menu of meanings and messages for the whole family to peruse, digest and engage with.

This use of marketing codes, all intended to capture a reader's attention, applied equally to patriotic sentiments, royal allegiances, ideological thought and contemporary events. Selling commodities during the First World War augmented the firm's ability to use the emotive tools of advertising and interconnecting its sales rhetoric with emotive narratives and implied conjectures was a programme the firm appeared to embrace. Through portrayals of war weary soldiers, military camaraderie and nurses engaging with the aftermath of injured soldiers, the firm actively sought to connect consumers and commodities with the events of the period.



Figure 14. *Opportunities* (circa 1916). Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. Box 4 659.133SSTF

⁶¹ Figure 12. J. G. Graves, Receipts and Adverts, 1897-1898. 658.872SSTQ SLSL. Figure 13. *Opportunities* (circa 1930), Box 2. 659.133SSTF. The Goddess Britannia had become mythically associated with Britain since the second century. However her portrayal complete with shield, trident and Corinthian helmet had been weaved into British historical narratives particularly through the reign of Elizabeth 1 when Britannia was immortalised as the saviour and protector of the queen's naval fleet. For further information see: Virginia Hewitt. 'Britannia: 1st–21st century,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online edition, 2007).

⁶² Blanche, B. Elliot, *A History of English Advertising* (London, 1962), pp. 44-45.

'On Active Service,' was an advertisement dedicated to the sales of the firm's gramophones and portrayed the three military arms of the Army, Air Force and Navy (figure 14).⁶³ Fixed with images of camaraderie and apparent joviality the advertisement alluded to and conveyed a message of confident victory. Both intuitive and captivating, this tangible commodity was able to do 'its bit' by dismissing the gloom of wartime fears and melancholy. Indeed the gramophone, suggested the narrative, had the capacity to unite the nation as they indulged in a programme of 'magnificent hymns, inspiring ballads, merry quips and triumphant military music performed by crack regimental bands'.⁶⁴ Such indulgence, suggested the advertisement, presented the nation with a perfect antidote for wartime 'gloomy depression' and guaranteed to keep 'the spirits of the nation up to [the] high water mark'.⁶⁵ If such positively positioned yet emotive association with commodities failed to stir the heart or the wallet then other images including portrayals of injured soldiers and military veterans were solicited to project the realities of war onto a consuming public (figure 15).⁶⁶ In this example, the emotive tug was not just the image of the weary war-torn veteran but also the image of the British flag strategically placed in the background. The advertisement may have wanted to secure sales but it also had to procure those sales by balancing the images

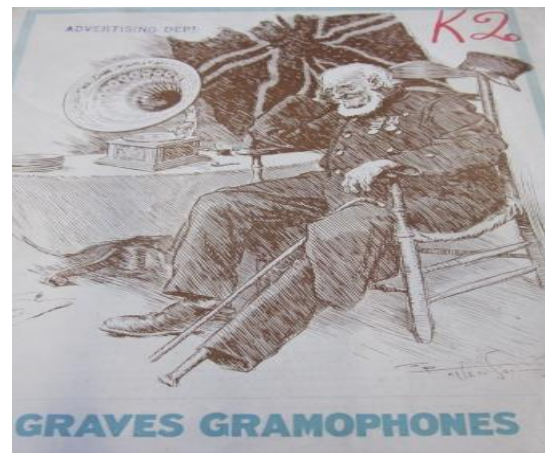


Figure 15. 'Graves' Gramophones' (circa 1917).
Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. Box 4
659.133SSTF

and their meanings. While the realities of war were portrayed by the veteran, the Union Jack loudly reinforced and proclaimed the meanings of patriotism and messages of victory.

Stirring up patriotic sentiments and nourishing and nurturing those sentiments through the act of consumption involved the production of a constructed advertising agenda and Graves readily applied that agenda to augment the sale of commodities. While choosing to embrace those meanings was ultimately the consumer's decision, those decisions were interwoven and imbued with a series of politicised and socio-cultural narratives and nuances. As

⁶³ Figure, 14. 'On Active Service,' (circa 1916), Box 4. 659.133SSTF. SLSL.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Figure, 15. 'Graves Gramophones' (circa, 1917), Box 4. 659.133SSTF. SLSL.

Richards argues, advertisements not only 'function to invest commodities with many of the attributes of the human agents of history', they also seek to 'place human beings right at the centre of signification'.⁶⁷ Placing human beings at the centre of signification and captivating an audience was a business that Graves' firm was becoming all too familiar with. Both its programme of retailing and its ability to connect with customers through the application of advertising language and tools helped to swell the ranks of customers. Such tools would be similarly adopted and adapted to captivate the attention of another audience of consumers; those occupying and embellishing their lives in Britain's suburbia.

J. G. Graves: Selling to Suburbia

The variety and plethora of commodities filling the pages of the firm's catalogues demonstrated the company's ability and indeed its determination to connect with a growing audience of consumers. That connection involved a two-way programme of interaction between the consumer and the retailer. For some consumers, self-gratification, self-awareness and self-esteem were becoming increasingly attached to the consumption of tangible commodities. In an interview with a Sheffield suburban householder the interviewee recalled her eager embracement of the suburban life. '... once we had moved here, you really felt that you had climbed the social ladder...you felt a sense of pride and achievement and you wanted that to come across in all aspects of your life'.⁶⁸ For the firm, acknowledging and recognising these interconnected webs of desire was essential. Stimulating such changes in British consumer habits included a growth of new employment opportunities, an increase in the rise of commuter travel, new and more affordable housing and rises in real wages.⁶⁹ Noting the rapidity of changes to incomes, Benson shows that while the 'average income per head [had grown] by 75 per cent between 1851- 1901' a far greater and sharper increase of 500 per cent occurred between 1901-1951.⁷⁰ Even while considering an adjustment for inflation (which as Benson notes would have impacted upon

⁶⁷ Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford, 1990), p. 10.

⁶⁸ Interview with a Bradway resident, Sheffield, 2003. See Richardson, R. 'Opportunity Knocks: The Development of Sheffield's West End Suburbia, 1920s-1950s' (unpublished BA dissertation, Sheffield Hallam University, 2003), p. 27.

⁶⁹ For wider discussion on the rise of new employment opportunities and particularly those involving white collar and white blouse opportunities see chapter 4 on gender. See also: Paul Johnson *20th Century Britain: Economic, Social and Cultural Change* (London, 1994).

⁷⁰ Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain*, p. 13.

‘potential purchasing power’) the historian is keen to point out that income for the ‘average British consumer’ in real terms had shown a ‘seven fold increase] between the early nineteenth and late twentieth centuries by ‘doubl[ing] between 1851 and 1901 and increas[ing] a further 50 per cent between 1901 and 1951’.⁷¹

Alongside this rise in income, Britain was adopting a modernising approach to its housing and house building projects, the main focus of which involved developments on the outskirts of towns and cities. This suburban terrain with its modern housing stock and propagated by a growth of mortgage lenders brought added appeal to those consumers witnessing and enjoying a new found income.⁷² By the 1890s, suburbia was becoming a ‘social phenomenon’, or as Liberal politician C.F.G. Masterman termed it in 1909 a complete ‘civilisation’.⁷³ While the first decade of the 1900s witnessed a steady growth of suburban dwellings, the end of the First World War saw its construction ‘resume at a feverish pace to house the middle class’s latest additions to its ranks’.⁷⁴ By the interwar years, suburbia had witnessed a determined shift in its social allegiance and occupancy.⁷⁵ Stimulated by this growth of speculative builders, building societies, government housebuilding programmes and new employment opportunities, the lower middle classes fortunate enough to enter into this suburban environment were becoming increasingly attracted to a new and exciting lifestyle.⁷⁶ As suggested by Whitehand and Carr, by the eve of the Second World War, Britain had been transformed from the most urbanised to the most suburbanised country in the world.⁷⁷

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 13.

⁷² While Suburbia was not new (it had been slowly advancing in Britain since the mid-1800s) its original attraction to the wealthier classes seeking to distance themselves from the unhealthy and densely populated urban environment had begun to attract new householders in the form of the lower middle classes. See: John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing, 1815-1970* (London, 1978), p. 101.

⁷³ Cohen, *Household Gods*, p. 101; Charles, F. G. Masterman also cited in Cohen, *Household Gods*, p. 101. See also, Charles F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (1909), pp. 57-58; Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p. 188.

⁷⁴ Cohen, *Household Gods*, p. 101.

⁷⁵ For wider discussions on the subject of suburbia and its social occupancy see: Paul Oliver, Ian Davis and Ian Bentley, *Dunroamin: The Suburban Semi and its Enemies* (Essex, 1983), p. 125; Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*.

⁷⁶ For an example of Building Societies growth see C. Scott. *Cheltenham and Gloucester A Tradition of Change, 150 years of C & G*. (Gloucester, 2000). For government legislation and wider discussion on the housing crisis, including the Tudor Walters Report see: Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*.

⁷⁷ Jeremy W. R. Whitehand & Christine M. H. Carr, ‘The creators of England’s inter-war suburbs.’ *Urban History Journal*: 28, part 2 (2001), p. 218.

For this growing number of lower middle class families, life in suburbia was not just about bricks, mortar and mortgages, it was also about embracing a lifestyle. It was about self-betterment, respectability, moral responsibility, self-attainment, social recognition, family values, and achievement. 'Excitement, exhilaration, pride in laying down a deposit that would lead to home ownership – these were among the dominant emotions' of those seeking a new lifestyle in suburbia.⁷⁸ While the bricks and mortar portrayed a tangible and external view of accomplishment, life in suburbia also came attached with concepts and customs, practices and procurements. Furthermore, notes Cohen, there was 'an apparent narrowing of the divide between the upper reaches of the middle class and its lower echelons' and 'crucial to that levelling' was the obtainment of 'material possessions'.⁷⁹ Suburbia was about 'getting and spending'.⁸⁰ It was about personal achievement, public display and self-gratification through consumption and consumer choices. The aesthetics, accessories and accoutrements, the furnishings, the fripperies and the fashions, all of which had the potential to signal a lifestyle, could be made affordable and attainable through the retailing programmes of firms such as J. G Graves.

With a modern and innovative business programme, Graves' enticing display of commodities had the potential to fulfil the desires and needs of these suburban consumers. Furthermore, as Benson notes, savvy retailing 'entrepreneurs concentrated their attention increasingly upon the growing number of consumers to be found in the urban and suburban areas of the country'.⁸¹ Not only did the firm have a direct medium of communication, but the variety of commodities and the compilation of the catalogues began to be steered and engineered to whet the appetites of the suburban consumer. As the firm aimed to reflect the desires of the suburban household its catalogues brimmed with items for a fashionable lifestyle, from domestic items intended to ease the drudgery of household labour to commodities fashioned for the pursuit of rational recreation, and from ornaments, knick-knacks and fripperies meant for aesthetic display to gadgets and gizmos that signalled the embracement of the new, the modern, the innovative and the progressive. This extensive range of products included bicycles for the whole family, binoculars for the bird watcher,

⁷⁸ Oliver, 'Great Expectations: Suburban Values and the Role of the Media', in Oliver et al *Dunroamin*, p. 125.

⁷⁹ Cohen, *Household Gods*, p. 133.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁸¹ Benson, *The Rise of Consumer Society*, p. 44. While Benson does not specifically mention the activities of mail order their efforts have to be considered alongside those of the city centre retailers.

bowling balls, tennis rackets and billiard tables for recreation, musical instruments, the latest radios, records and cameras for entertainment and fabrics and furniture, floor coverings and fine china to decorate and adorn the suburban home.⁸² Indeed, having recognised the potential and increasing popularity of these new technological must-haves, the firm of Graves established its own radio and transmitter factory on the outskirts of Sheffield during the 1930s. With the intention of producing and promoting the sale of high



Figures 16-18. Sales pamphlet for Graves National Radio Receiver. Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. Box 4. 659.133SSTF

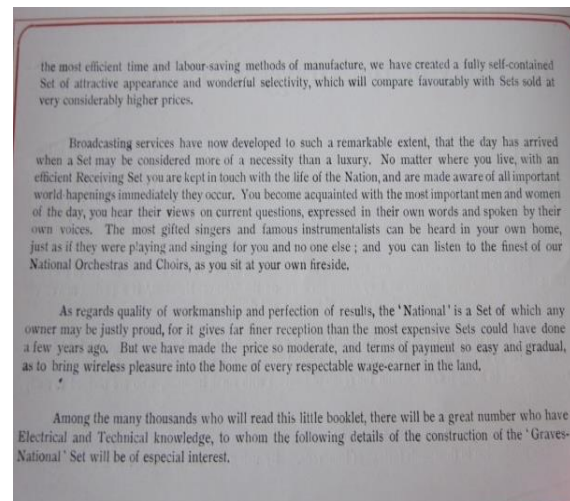


Figure 17.

quality radios bearing the name 'Graves National' the firm produced a fifteen page booklet 'Graves National Radio Receiver' (figures 16-18).⁸³ The informational booklet (produced in 1934) provided customers with details of the radios' construction, the factory's assembly lines and photographs of its technicians and trained operatives. If this informative guide failed to whet the appetite, then advertising features with images of the home and family enjoying their newly purchased radio were symbolically constructed to portray an idealised image of suburban life (figure 19).⁸⁴



Figure 18.

⁸² A wide range of these items can be found in the catalogues of J. G. Graves. See boxes 1-4, 659.133SSTF. SLSL.

⁸³ Figures 16-18. J. G. Graves Box 4: 659.133SSTF, SLSL. For further examples of supplementary advertising literature related to Graves' radio factory. See Boxes 4-5: 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

⁸⁴ Figure 19. *Opportunities*, (Autumn, 1935). Box 4: 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

In the privacy and comfort of their own domestic setting, Graves' customers were invited to consider their aspirations and contemplate their purchasing habits. They were also invited to evaluate and re-evaluate those aspirations alongside their personal income and their personal willingness to either absorb or discard the cultural relationship that glued suburbia to programmes of consumption.



Figure 19. Front cover of *Opportunities*, (Autumn, 1935). Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. Box 4 659.133SSTF

Whether embracing the collaborative ventures of suburbia with its lifestyle and consumer culture or simply abstaining, the suburban occupant could not easily escape the trappings that came with the home situated on the leafy lanes and crescents of the city's outskirts. Mail order, with its enticing catalogues, was in a prime position to engage with the consumer whose habits and desires were being formed, shaped and indeed changed by their home environment, social constructs, cultural awareness and modernising retailing programmes. As Onufrijchuk suggests, mail order was a retailing programme 'sufficiently comprehensive to project a vision of an entire consumption universe of products to satisfy all wants – including wants conceived in the act of perusing the catalogue itself'.⁸⁵ By paying attention to the catalogues' contents, their associated constructs and advertising's ability to convey meaning, Graves' firm was placed in a prime position to sell its merchandise.

This is not to suggest that the suburban customer of Graves was passive and easily manipulated, but rather that Graves recognised the potential of this market and undertook efforts to capture their attention. Indeed, while Belk suggests that consumers were more than 'active participants in [their] own self-seduction' but were 'co-producers of desire and identity', Trentmann argues that 'consumers did not emerge on their own but in dynamic relation with other social actors and agencies'.⁸⁶ For the suburban consumer, those agencies

⁸⁵ Roman Onufrijchuk 'Origins of the Consumer Culture' in Leiss et al., *Social Communication in Advertising*, p. 79.

⁸⁶ Russell W Belk cited in Frank Trentmann (ed.), *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford, 2006), p. 3 and Frank Trentmann, *Ibid.*, p. 14. See also: Russell W Belk, 'The

and actors not only included the house builders, the mortgage lenders and their new found incomes, but also the opportunistic ventures of retailers. The firm clearly understood the socio-cultural interconnectedness between commodities and suburban desires and with the added bonus of producing its own advertising literature the company could amplify this interconnectedness. Through the use of advertising tools and the anchoring of romanticised

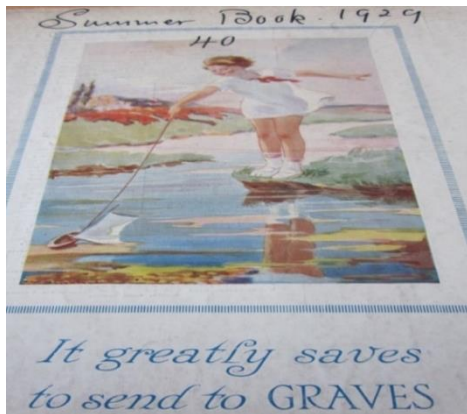


Figure 20. J. G. Graves Mail Order Catalogue, (Summer, 1929). Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library, Box 3, 659.133SSTF.

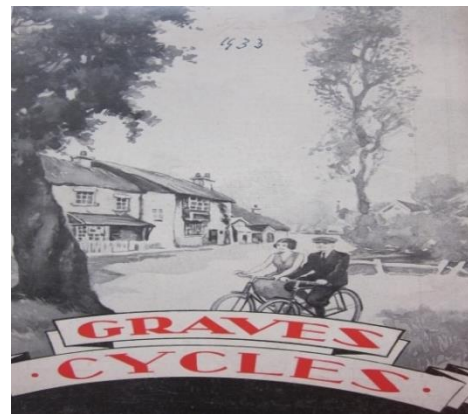


Figure 21. J. G. Graves Mail Order Catalogue, (Summer, 1933). Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library, Box 3, 659.133SSTF.



Figure 22. J. G. Graves Mail Order Catalogue, (Spring, 1938). Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library, Box 3, 659.133SSTF



Figure 23. J. G. Graves Mail Order Catalogue, (April, 1939). Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library, Box 3, 659.133SSTF

suburban images, the firm began to project and incorporate idealised views of suburbia in its marketing material. Prior to the rise of suburbia most of the catalogues' front covers had been produced with either simple images of the firm or its trade name. However by the

interwar period there appeared to be a definitive shift in production as the catalogues increasingly began to portray images that distinctly reflected and connected with these meanings of suburbia (figures 20-23).⁸⁷ The home and its comforts, the pleasant avenue, the pursuit of the rational and the engagement with pastimes that signalled sobriety and respectability were all situated to connote and portray the respectable suburban family. This use of idealised constructs were designed to anchor the sale of commodities to the pursuit of a lifestyle; a lifestyle that was being co-jointly produced, enhanced and embroidered by both retailer and consumer. These inter-related consumer activities and retailer focussed operations were about desire and fulfilment rather than necessity and need. The front covers rarely displayed an actual commodity for sale, rather they were designed to focus the customer's attention, encourage them to share in the image's identity, engage with its connotations and invite them to consume the commodities and their associated meanings. While the firm's sale of bicycles heralded the pursuit of a healthy lifestyle and rational recreation, the promotion of encyclopaedic libraries, books of poetry, travel and art recognised its cultural attachment to the arts, education and personal achievement.⁸⁸ As the consumption of the J. G. Graves 'Ruskin Lily style canteen of cutlery' (figure 24) signalled refinement, the firm's sale of musical instruments, ranging from clarinets to violins, indicated cultural enrichment.⁸⁹ From the entrance hall to the bedroom, the suburban dweller could furnish their homes with the latest styles in rugs and carpets, place silver salt cellars and china tea sets on their dining room tables, position ornately detailed mirrors in the hallway, hang pretty fabrics from their windows and arrange pictures, fripperies and



Figure 24. J. G. Graves Mail Order Catalogue (1935). Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. Box 1, 659.133SSTF.

⁸⁷ A wide selection of these and other images can be seen in the J. G. Graves, Catalogue Collection, boxes 1-4, 659.133SSTF. SLSL.

⁸⁸ See box 1 or J. G. Graves archives for a selection of Bicycles advertisements. 'Let's talk of Graves Pocket catalogue,' (circa 1910), Best Songs and Best Poems, p. 93. Encyclopaedias, p. 9. 659.133SSTF. SLSL.

⁸⁹ Figure, 24. Wellington cutlery with ornate Ruskin Lily design, 1935 catalogue, p. 6. Box 1. Figure, 6. Music and Musical Instruments, Box 4, 659.133SSTF SLSL.

fancies on the dressing table, the side-board and the mantelpiece.⁹⁰ Indeed the homes of such consumers could cry out with the statements of attainment, fulfilment and achievement. As Ryan notes, the home took on a whole 'new significance in the early twentieth century when the possibilities of mass democracy citizenship [became] tied up with the ownership or tenancy of property'.⁹¹

Whether the items had a practical use or were merely aesthetic, they flowed through the pages of the catalogues carrying their symbolic meanings and attachments to a suburban lifestyle. For Leiss, such changes of goods from being 'primarily satisfiers of wants to being primarily communicators of meaning' revolved around three distinct marketing forces.⁹² Firstly, there was 'the recognition [that] consumption was a legitimate sphere for individual self-realisation'.⁹³ Secondly, was 'the discovery by marketers and advertisers that the personal, psychological or social domains of the consumer, rather than the characteristics of goods, were a vital merchandising [activity]'.⁹⁴ Thirdly, 'revolutions in communications and mass-media technologies [including] advertising formats' and the use of 'visual and iconic imagery' embroidered commodities with a socially functioning nature.⁹⁵ Leiss' observations, while derived from twenty-first century perspectives are significant points to consider in this analysis of Graves' marketing agenda. The firm was not merely aware of its audience but understood it. It understood the cultural values and the social signifiers that aligned with the commodity. It also understood the productive use of advertising tools and the value of using contemporary visual and iconic imagery to enhance the interconnectedness between identity and consumer choices. The firm also understood that practices of consumption and programmes of retailing involved a mutually coherent and cogent force. As Leiss et al suggests, while 'layers of images and symbols [may] relate products to [a consumer's] personal happiness and social success' it was the 'consumer society [who] constructed this field of symbols and implanted it at the centre of market place activity'.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ A wide selection of these items and many others can be seen in the catalogues produced by J. G. Graves. See boxes 1 and 4. 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

⁹¹ Deborah S. Ryan 'The Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition, 1908-39' in Maggie Andrews & Mary M. Talbot (ed) *All the World and Her Husband: Women in Twentieth Century Consumer Culture* (London, 2000), p. 12.

⁹² Leiss et al., *Social Communication in Advertising*, p. 285.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

For Douglas and Isherwood, goods don't just 'communicate information' but act as 'an entire information system [and] form the very framework that classifies persons and events'.⁹⁷ Goods also, as Cronin argues 'give form to the social world of humans'.⁹⁸ Giving form to the social world of the suburban consumer meant that retailers such as Graves had to recognise those desires and reflect them in their business programmes. The goods had to indicate attainment, signal sophistication and refinement, reflect the narrowing of the middle class divide and remain affordable. With its wide range of commodities, tried and tested credit programme, advertising attentiveness and importantly the co-operation of consumers, the firm was perfectly positioned to target this new class conscious community of consumers; even if suburbia attracted the controversy of critics.

Suburbia: Consumption, Controversies and J. G. Graves

While J. G. Graves targeted the suburban householder, suburbia itself was not without its critics. Such criticism was not only levied at the bricks and mortar of the developments but also at the suburban lifestyle, including spending and consumer habits. While in 1933, the Congress of Modern Architecture described the suburb as 'an urbanistic folly...[a] squalid antechamber of the city [and one of the] 'greatest evils of the century,' four years later in 1937 John Betjeman's poem 'Slough' levied a vitriolic attack against the suburban occupants.⁹⁹ Describing some suburban dwellers as 'bald[ing] young clerks' unable to 'distinguish birdsong from radio' and whose passion for 'tinned fruit, tinned meat, tinned minds, tinned breaths' could only be matched by their love of modern appliances and 'polished oak desks' was an attack aimed at the suburban lifestyle and spending habits.¹⁰⁰ Indeed such loathing of the suburbs and their occupants warranted only the 'friendly bombs of Slough'.¹⁰¹ Undoubtedly the disapproval and denunciation of the suburbs stemmed from the conversion of corn fields to cul-de-sacs and green fields to aptly named Green avenues and crescents. The loss of the countryside, or rather the loss of a romanticised idyll, precipitated an attack on the suburban householder, their daily lives and their daily choices.

⁹⁷ Mary Douglas & Baron Isherwood in Anne M. Cronin, *Advertising Myths: The Strange Half-Lives of Images and Commodities* (London, 2004), p. 80. See also: Mary Douglas & Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption* (London, 1979).

⁹⁸ Cronin, *Advertising Myths*. p. 80.

⁹⁹ Ian Davis in Whitehand & Carr, 'The creators of England's inter-war suburbs', p. 229; John Betjeman, 'Slough', re-printed in *John Betjeman's Collected Poems* (London, 1973), p. 22.

¹⁰⁰ *Betjeman's Collected Poems*, p. 22.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

However, while Betjeman's remarks were extreme and acidic in tone, he had touched on the social engineering that suburbia engendered, including what he perceived to be the consumer and recreational habits of its residents. For some, suburbia was about accomplishment and achievement, display and demonstration, endorsement and encouragement. The oral evidence of a resident in Dore, Sheffield who moved to the area in 1938 noted that dinner parties had become a central feature of her family's social activity, as had participating in literary groups, cricket clubs and rambling organisations.¹⁰² The suburban lifestyle, if the residents chose, could also be about the consumption of concepts as well as the consumption of commodities. The firm of J. G. Graves engaged with this complex and interrelated programme of consumption. The radio heralded by Graves as a commodity to educate, inform and enlighten was far removed from Betjeman's numbing object of mental discord.¹⁰³ The labour saving devices sold by the firm freed the housewife from domestic drudgery, the tin opener added to the consumption of the easy and the convenient and the bicycles and bowling balls ushered in new programmes of respectable leisure. Along with the writing desk, the couch, the dinner service and the coffee table, the commodities, while profiting the company also profited the suburban audience, including its concepts and connotations.

Suburban decriers such as Betjeman were not the only critics to voice their concern and condemnation. Contemporary journalist Philip Gibbs viewed suburbia as a 'great straggling territory' full of occupants 'struggling for social advancement' who were 'buoyed by a wave of material prosperity'.¹⁰⁴ They had, argued Gibbs 'adopted the manners and customs of that class which used to be called the "Upper Ten"'.¹⁰⁵ This criticism levied at the suburban householder and their spending habits had deeper roots. As Cohen points out, comments such as those by Gibbs had followed hot on the heels of Victorian social thinkers such as Thorstein Veblen who in 1899 had conceded that 'consumption lay at the heart of social

¹⁰² Oral evidence of a suburban resident in Sheffield (2002), Richardson, 'Opportunity Knocks', p. 29.

¹⁰³ Graves was not only keen to point out the radio's ability to keep listeners abreast of the news but also highlighted its broadcasts of current affairs and cultural programmes. See: 'Graves National Radio Receiver (August 1934). Boxes 4-5: 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

¹⁰⁴ Philip Gibbs quoted in Cohen, *Household Gods*, p. 133. See also: Phillip Gibbs, *The New Man: A Portrait Study of the Latest Type* (London, 1914) pp. 148-9.

¹⁰⁵ Gibbs quoted in Cohen, *Household Gods*, p. 133. 'The Upper Ten' was a term coined in 1844 by author Nathaniel Parker Willis to refer to the elite and aristocratic circles of New York. For further reading see: <https://www.history.com/news/before-the-one-percent-americans-resented-the-upper-ten>. Accessed October 2015.

stratification'.¹⁰⁶ For Veblen, the mobility of the population had the capacity to 'expose the individual to the observations of [others] who have no other means of judging reputability than [through] the display of [his] goods'.¹⁰⁷ While such criticism was originally aimed at the consumer habits of the leisure classes, this programme of 'conspicuous consumption' (as Veblen termed it) had 'set the standards for [an] entire society' as 'wasteful goods' came to 'represent reputability'.¹⁰⁸ This 'entire' society had now, through the vitriol of suburban critics, become inextricably linked to the rise of suburbia with its focus on consumption, and especially a consumption that for some appeared wasteful, unrestricted and to a degree, socially levelling. However it was that social levelling (in tow with suburbia's concepts and constructs) that provided a new audience for retailing outlets such as J. G. Graves. It was an environment that nurtured a programme of social advancement and demonstrated (through consumer choices) a capacity to display a new order of social separation; one vying to project just as strongly the class an individual did belong to as much as the class they did not. While other Victorian social thinkers such as Max Weber observed that status groups were held together by lifestyles and conformative patterns of consumption, Georg Simmel argued that 'the cultivating of objects...beyond the performance of their natural constitution' ultimately engendered a process of self cultivation.¹⁰⁹ Whether these conformative patterns of consumption and programmes of self-cultivation yielded to outward displays such as in dress and fashions or were contained in the inner sanctum of the home environment was irrelevant, suburbia with its conforming patterns of consumption had its place in British society and the firm of J. G. Graves had a place in its promotion and provision. For firms such as J. G. Graves, providing the accoutrements to those aspects of life was certainly an opportunity not to be missed. Despite their critics, suburbia and its occupants were there to stay, as were their spending habits, their consumer choices, their attachment to the home and their embracement of a new lifestyle.

¹⁰⁶ Cohen, *Household Gods*, p. 133. See also Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*; T. Veblen, *Conspicuous Consumption: Unproductive Consumption of Goods is Honourable*, (Re-published in Penguin Classics, 2005).

¹⁰⁷ Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, pp. 53-54.

¹⁰⁸ Cohen, *Household Gods*, p. 133.

¹⁰⁹ On Weber see: Harriet Bradley. 'Changing Social Structures: Class and Gender' in Stuart Hall & Bram Gieben, (ed.), *Formations of Modernity: Understanding Modern Societies, An Introduction* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 197. Georg Simmel quoted in Alan Swingewood, *A Short History of Sociological Thought*, p. 102. See also Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*, p. 124.

In summary, the firm of J. G. Graves was aware of the social and cultural agendas of consumers. It was also aware of how income and offers of respectable credit could benefit both the business and the consumer. It was this interconnectedness along with the ability of the firm to construct its own advertising literature that gave the company an ability to captivate its audience. Grasping the dichotomies and dilemmas of credit, the firm packaged and presented its credit programme within a menu of warm reassuring tones and an ethos of respectability. Swiftly dealing with any hint of negativity, Graves continually assured and reassured customers that the firm was trustworthy and reputable and customers accessing its credit programme were neither socially inferior nor any less respectable than those with ready cash in their pockets.

With its understanding of the relationship between commodities, concepts and productive advertising, the firm's investment in the use of narratives was both enticing and relevant. Selectively incorporating meanings and messages into the advertisements the company linked its sale of commodities to contemporary values, beliefs and philosophies. Graves also used his marketing material to echo, reinforce and impart his own personal allegiances and particularly that of Samuel Smiles. For Graves, the Smilesean philosophy was a recipe for personal success, self-achievement and social advancement. It was also used as an addendum to encourage sales, and wherever Graves and his firm could marry the commodity to a concept they did so. Whether such practices encouraged a growth of Smilesean disciples would be impossible to determine, but the firm certainly used its marketing agenda as a platform to popularise the Smilesean message.

While the firm was intent on augmenting the opportunities of consumption to a wide audience, the rise of suburbia with its social and cultural connotations provided it with a growing new audience. Able to provide and fulfil the needs of those suburban householders still living on a budget, the company's catalogues during the inter-war years and beyond became awash with goods to meet their demands, fulfil their desires and satisfy their new appetites. From the domestic labour saving devices to the recreational radio, from the gadgets, gizmos and gazebos to the fancies and fripperies of fashion, the firm was able to entice and provide. With appetites whetted through a stream of constructed and idealised images, the suburban house and its occupiers could, if they chose to, cement their allegiance to a suburban identity; one aided by the efforts of this mail order company. In

that respect there had to be a programme of mutual co-operation between consumer and retailer. Such co-operation was both reflected by and reactionary to the changes occurring in Britain's social and economic structure; a narrowing of the class divide, a rise in real wages, the development of new housing projects, new employment opportunities, the proposition of obtaining respectable forms of credit and an embracement of fashionable consumer durables. In essence, entrepreneurs such as J. G. Graves were aided by the period in which they were operating. It was a ripe environment for the firm to flourish; the opportunities were in place and captivating an audience proved neither too difficult nor too problematic.

Chapter Four

Mail Order and Gendered Representations.

The firm of J. G. Graves was establishing itself as a leading mail order retailer during a period of political, social and economic change. Alongside urban modernisation, rises in real income and the growth of suburbia were a wealth of retailers vying to accommodate the needs of consumers; needs often being fuelled by the prospects of self-betterment and self-fulfilment. Affecting men and women, this changing political, social and economic landscape also began to reshape the gendered spaces and ideology of 'separate spheres'. This chapter will analyse how the firm of J. G. Graves fitted into this complex change, how it reflected issues of gender through its marketing material and how it utilised its advertising tools to reflect gendered differences. Initially focussing upon the firm's representation of women, the chapter will explore how the firm marketed its range of consumer durables and how its marketing agenda fitted into a period of change concerning women and domestic practices. The chapter will demonstrate that while the mail order enterprise offered an alternative way to shop and reflected the needs of a changing market, its advertising narrative retained a conventional and moralising approach concerning women and their roles at home. Continuing with a focus on women, the section will also examine how the firm accommodated women's changing needs and desires in relation to fashions, clothing and dress during the early part of the twentieth century. It will discuss how it attempted to increase its sale of commodities through the use of advertising tools, language and images and how, by embroidering its range of fashions with socially acceptable labels and titles, the firm sought to ingratiate a diverse audience of women consumers.

The second half of the chapter will focus upon the firm's determination to attract an audience of male customers. It will discuss how it represented its male clientele and how its sales agenda engaged with an engineered and structured marketing rhetoric. It will analyse the firm's use of social discourse and its attempts to link the male consumer with contemporary meanings and messages. It will also consider the firm's tactical use of ingratiating narratives, enticing imagery, sophisticated labels and the use of high-brow lead-in titles in its attempts to attract a lower middle class audience and will argue that the practice of mail order targeted men as consumers of fashion just as forcibly as it did women.

Fashioning Freedom? A Gendered Approach to Advertising

The firm of J. G. Graves sought to advance the opportunity to consume and it set out its stall to attract, ingratiate and accommodate the needs of its customers. While for some those needs revolved around the practical and essential, for others it involved desire, attainment and aspiration. For some consumers those desires and expectations were catered for by a wealth of city centre stores with the capacity to entice through their dazzling displays, profusion of goods and ability to offer the haptic through the provision of dressing rooms and attentive sales staff. Adding to this enticement and securing the women's length of visit were the additional facilities of powder rooms, hairdressing courts, restaurants, tea rooms, writing rooms and supervised children's areas.¹ Indeed if the environment failed to attract the women then the stores' employment of trained female staff were also, as Adburgham points out, becoming increasingly proficient in their understanding of their female customers' needs.² With such feminised fixtures and fittings in place the department stores optimised their attraction and engaged the woman shopper in a new and vibrant way. They also gave women a new found confidence to enter into these public spaces; spaces that while 'blurring class divisions' simultaneously raised concern for some 'social observers and customers' concerned about this 'mingling of social classes'.³ However, as Nava is keen to point out, this modernising approach to consumer amenities was 'considered necessary for the social appeal and the commercial success of the stores'.⁴ In addition this blurring of class division amongst programmes and practices of consumption also coincided with the politicisation of women. As Nava and Leach acknowledge, not only did 'the high point of the department store coincide with the peak years of suffragette militancy' but women's 'participation in [this new] consumer experience challenged and subverted [those] complex qualities traditionally known as feminine-dependence, passivity, domestic inwardness and sexual purity'.⁵ Indeed this was a period witnessing the development of the New Woman, whose dress, fashions, habits and activities were being re-fashioned, re-organised and re-defined. As De Groot notes 'aspirations embodying conventions of family and female proper

¹ Mica Nava, 'Modernity's Disavowal' in: Falk & Campbell (ed.), *The Shopping Experience*, p. 67.

² Alison Adburgham quoted in Nava, 'Modernity's Disavowal', pp. 67-68.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁴ *Ibid.* See also A. Adburgham, *Shopping in Style: London from the Restoration to Edwardian Elegance* (London, 1979), p. 159.

⁵ William Leach cited in Nava, 'Modernity's Disavowal', p. 72.

conduct were themselves being modified by changing patterns of education, expectation and occupations for women'.⁶

In similar fashion to the department stores, the company of J. G. Graves recognised its need to attract the woman consumer, sell its products and compete in this advancing arena of retailing practices.⁷ Simultaneously it had to accommodate changing fashions, desires and wants whilst also maintaining a structured and engineered approach to its advertising programme. For Graves, a successful advertising campaign aimed to connect the commodity with the consumer and that interconnectedness included the use of familiar and recognisable gendered narratives. An examination of the company's advertisements for domestic items between 1900 and 1930 certainly appeared to adhere to this familiar division of gendered roles and spaces. For example, the advertising language chosen to market the company's vacuum



Figure 25 J. G. Graves Mail Order Catalogue (circa 1910). Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. 659.133SSTF. Boxes 1 and 5.

cleaners (figure 25) was specifically targeted towards women, reinforcing her command of the domestic setting and cementing her identity as housekeeper, housewife and mother.⁸

Vacuum cleaners, the latest essential household tool began to slowly grow in popularity during the early 1900s.⁹ Furthermore, its purchase through Graves' credit programme made the commodity more affordable and accessible to a wider audience of consumers. Able to speed up household duties, they were portrayed as hygienic, modern, convenient, less time-consuming and less-laborious. Yet while this latest item in the domestic armoury provided a tangible answer to household drudgery, its marketing, certainly for the firm of J. G. Graves,

⁶ Joanna De Groot, 'Metropolitan desires and colonial connections: reflections of consumption and empire' in Catherine Hall and Sonya, O. Rose (ed.), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 185.

⁷ The firm's products were aimed at a wide audience including the housewife and the household who employed domestic servants.

⁸ Figure 25. J. G. Graves Mail Order Catalogue (circa 1910). Boxes 1 and 5: 659.133SSTF.

⁹ For discussion on consumer durables and their diffusion across Britain see; Sue Bowden and Avna Offer, 'The technology revolution that never was: gender, class and the diffusion of household appliances in interwar England', in Victoria De Grazia and Ellen Furlough, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (California, 1996), pp. 244-274.

relied heavily on a gendered rhetoric that placed all women at the centre of this commodity's assumed desire. Women, the advertisement suggested, instinctively developed a fever to spring clean. '*When the spring cleaning fever attacks them*' suggested the marketing narrative, housewives become all consumed with their duties to clean, sanitise and deal with the 'dust menace' that sought to infiltrate their homes.¹⁰ This astute use of advertising language focused on women as both consumers and domestic heroines. Portraying a homogenised view of housewives and mothers, all of whom appeared to spontaneously share the same domestic values and identity, the advertisement secured its allegiance to a menu of pre-established gendered concepts, spaces and roles. While the consumption of these domestic durables aided efficiency around the home, and certainly freed women from domestic drudgery, their advertisements did not release women from the ties that had cemented their identity to the domestic environment for generations. As Giles suggests, while 'on one hand [women] were encouraged to see themselves as agents of [domestic] modernisation and scientific rationalism, on the other hand they remained caught up in [these] conceptions of home'.¹¹

The firm of Graves, attempting to sell the modern appliance to a modernising housewife, recognised this deeply entrenched and embedded relationship that existed between the domestic front and conceptions of gender. It also reflected that existence by maintaining the status quo through its choice of advertising rhetoric. As Giles goes on to argue, manufacturers and advertisers had to ensure that women continued to purchase these new products and one incentive was to reinforce the message that 'housework was a labour of creative love and motherhood'.¹² While the commodity was new and the retailing programme was relatively new, the formula for selling retained a conventional approach to its marketing rhetoric. Furthermore, embedded and infused with gendered narratives, it was a language that readers and potential customers would have been familiar with. For advertising analyst Jonathan Bignell, the use of 'linguistic, visual and other kinds of signs' contained in advertising language are not simply there 'to denote something' but are aimed to 'trigger a range of connotations attached to the sign'.¹³ These connotations (explored by

¹⁰ Figure, 25.

¹¹ Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb*, p. 22.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹³ Jonathan Bignell, *Media Semiotics*, p. 16.

Bignell through the analysis of French linguist and semiotician Roland Barthes) suggest that the use of such advertising nuances is often associated with the reinforcement of myths.¹⁴ They are advertising codes set to represent, promote and sustain 'ways of thinking about people [and their] products [and are] structured to send particular messages to the reader of the text'.¹⁵ More importantly, argues Bignell, advertisers intentionally place such codes to reinforce familiar concepts and to 'purposefully play a particular social role'.¹⁶ If Bignell's arguments are applied in the context of Graves' advertisement for vacuum cleaners, then the company were not only utilising preconceived perceptions of women's roles but also reinforcing them.

While mail order gave women an opportunity to view the latest products and modern technological advancements, the product's accompanying sales narrative could also be challenging and divisive. It directed women to question and re-evaluate their domestic attentiveness and invited them to re-consider their commitment alongside the advancing production of mass consumer durables. How clean and presentable was her home? Were her domestic efforts on a par with others? How should her home be presented? Should she invest in these modern products to ease her own labour or would that question her domestic commitment? While economic historian Ben Fine suggests that conflict arises where 'attempt[s] are made at persuading consumers how they should perceive of themselves', Glennie argues that both 'producers and consumers collaborate in creating meaning systems [and especially when trying] to make sense of new objects'.¹⁷ This theory of collaboration and compliance is particularly pertinent in this analysis. This was a period when technology was beginning to infiltrate the home. As Giles notes, at the beginning of the twentieth century 'gas and electricity were set to transform the domestic environment', piped water and municipal sewerage systems created healthier environments and 'the rapid development of a whole range of potential labour-saving devices' would 'revolutionise housework'.¹⁸ Irons, vacuum cleaners, and later, refrigerators, washing machines and

¹⁴ Barthes use of 'Myths' refer to advertising signs, signals and connotations and should not be confused with the use of the term related to legends, fables or folklores. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁷ Ben Fine 'Addressing the Consumer' in Frank Trentmann (ed.), *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford, 2006), p. 294; Paul Glennie. 'Consumption within Historical Studies' in Daniel Miller (ed.), *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies* (London, 1995), p. 190.

¹⁸ Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb*, p. 20.

cleaner cooking appliances were all set to re-shape the domestic front, including the duties of the housewife.¹⁹ For Nava, the early twentieth century was a period when women became 'engaged in the project of making themselves at home in the maelstrom of modern life, of becoming the subjects as well as the objects of modernisation'.²⁰

Aiding this engagement with modernity was also a profusion of fashion magazines with their advice columns, recipes, lessons in etiquette and advertisements portraying the latest fashions of the day.²¹ Adding to this profusion of literature were the mail order catalogues, brimming over with commodities and marketing chit-chat, offers of credit, offers of convenience, and more importantly new appliances ready and willing to unleash the housewife from her domestic toil. Yet while this 'media of advice' which Giles notes 'was crucial in constructing the figure of the modern housewife' is acknowledged through the activities of magazines, the contributions of mail order has received little recognition.²² Yet mail order not only connoted the concept but supplied the commodity. Graves' domestic items ranged from washers, wringers, sewing machines, meat safes, refrigerators, cooking appliances and vacuum cleaners (sporting such feminine titles as 'Daisy') to a wealth of smaller gadgets, including juicers, sharpeners, graters, mixers and mincers designed to cater for the 'careful and thrifty housewife' allowing 'her to prepare [the best] dainty and appetizing meals'.²³ It is precisely this gendering of marketing rhetoric that creates a grey area. While Abrams sees this 'modern housewife wielding a new status and control', Giles advocates a degree of caution on just 'how far [this] proffered identity of the modern housewife did offer 'status and control'.²⁴ As Giles suggests, historians need to 'remain aware that [this] domestic modernity, despite the pleasures it offered, continued to tie women to what was seen as their appropriate place'.²⁵

¹⁹ For a detailed discussion on the early twentieth century home see: Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb*, pp. 12-28.

²⁰ Nava, 'Modernity's Disavowal', p. 64.

²¹ For discussion on women's magazines see: J. Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb*, pp. 117-128; Penny Tinkler & Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, 'Feminine Modernity in Inter-War Britain and North America: Corsets, Cars and Cigarettes', *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 20:3 (2008), pp. 113-143.

²² Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb*, p. 104.

²³ Mincer and Daisy vacuum cleaner featured in: *Opportunities* 1932. A wide range of other domestic commodities see J. G. Graves catalogues, boxes 1-4, 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

²⁴ M. Abrams quoted in Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb*, p. 104.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Complying with Nineteenth Century Domestic Ideology?

For historian Gerda Lerner, 'the housewife's job is [not only] gender linked – by definition [but] also [by] history;' a history that had its roots in social discourse, religious texts and gendered rhetoric.²⁶ In 1839 the Quaker turned Congregationalist, Sarah Stickney Ellis suggested 'The customs of English society have so constituted women the guardians of the comfort of their homes that like the vestals of old they cannot allow the lamp they cherish to be extinguished or to fail for want of oil without an equal share of degradation [becoming attached] to their names'.²⁷ Twenty years later, Isabella Beeton's book of *Household Management* (1861) maintained this idealisation of the housewife, suggesting that out of all of the values of the 'feminine character' none took the higher rank than that which 'enter[ed] into a knowledge of household duties'.²⁸ For both Ellis and Beeton, women, their roles and their identity were inescapably tied to the home and it was they who could and should take command of those domestic reigns. Davidoff and Hall have shown that domestic ideology was not only a central feature of nineteenth century social and domestic life but women played a vital role in its construction. Arguing that the 'capacity to create and beautify home was becoming an expectation and natural feminine identity' they also suggest that the home was 'shaping the division of labour'.²⁹ That division of labour was not only gendered, but women formed the vanguard of domestic labour; a labour infused with the narratives of virtue, honour, duty and love. Arguably, that domestic ideology continued to weave its way into the discourse of twentieth century advertising. Despite the rise of new appliances, new homes and new fashions, the advertising rhetoric of J. G. Graves could not quite divorce itself from the threads and narratives of the old order.

While retailers such as J. G. Graves continued to vie for the attention of the morally attuned and conscientious housewife, retailing itself was undergoing some change. While the firm was being forged during a period of manufacturing advancement, its growth had also followed a period of new religious tolerance where matters of consumption and spending had been re-evaluated. As Stearns notes, the late Victorian period saw Protestantism

²⁶ Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds its Past: Placing Women in History* (Oxford, 1981), p. 129.

²⁷ Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (Cambridge, 1839. Re-printed edition, 2010), p. 25.

²⁸ Isabella Beeton, *Book of Household Management* quoted in, Alison Twells, *British Women's History: A Documentary History from the Enlightenment to World War 1* (London, 2007), pp. 59-61.

²⁹ Leonore Davidoff & Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 362 and 384-5.

shifting its stance on issues of consumption and while it did not view 'consumer goods [as] a top priority [they] were part of God's gift to mankind'.³⁰ While such re-evaluation appeared to do little concerning the rhetoric of women's emancipation from the home, its association with consumption and retailing would have proven morally advantageous for J. G. Graves whose Methodist faith was keenly professed throughout his regular attendance at Sheffield's St John's Methodist and Townhead Baptist Chapels.³¹ As argued by Glennie, while there was a 'profusion of new consumer goods intimately associated with new sensibilities' there was also a definitive attempt to align practices of consumption with a moral protagonist.³² Consumer activities were not only 'made morally legitimate through notions of responsible consumption' but they also 'defined socially appropriate styles [which were then] inflected through [a] moralising [of] women's roles'.³³ Noting the arguments of Strasser and Miller, Glennie suggests that while 'women's domestic roles gave them authority over the relations of new objects to human activities in the home' such roles also helped create 'discourses of domesticity'; discourses which were 'highly susceptible to the marketing of durables'.³⁴ For the firm of Graves, mass production, technological advancements, gendered advertising discourse and religious tolerance over matters of consumption were all elements that aided the firm's progression and provided it with a productive and progressive marketing environment in which to trade.

Graves' business agenda, his approach to advertising and this consumer marriage between women and the home was further reinforced by a series of wider issues and programmes, including national events and additional retailing initiatives. During times of austerity and national conflict this relationship between gender and domesticity was not only maintained but given added gravitas. An advertisement for drapery marketed during the First World War aimed its address at the dutiful, conscientious, shrewd and savvy housewife (figure 26).³⁵

³⁰ Peter N. Stearns, *Consumerism in World History: The Global Transformation of Desire* (Oxford, 2006), p. 57.

³¹ J. G. Graves 'Some Memories' p. 35. See also Keith Farnsworth. 'The Graves Inheritance: The Story of the J. G. Graves Charitable Trust, 1930-1990' (Sheffield), p. 7.

³² Glennie, 'Consumption within Historical Studies', p. 182.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

³⁴ Susan, Strasser and Roger Miller cited in Glennie, 'Consumption within Historical Studies', p. 182. See also: Roger Miller, "'Selling Mrs Consumer": Advertising and the creation of suburban socio-spatial relations, 1910-1930', *Antipode* 23:3 (1991), pp. 263-301.

³⁵ Figure 26. Multi Product Catalogue (circa 1917) Box 1. 659.133SSTF ©SLSL.

Paying her credit for her attention to budgeting, her understanding of the commodity's value and her knowledge of the quality and longevity of goods, this carefully arranged use of linguistic and semiological signs did not just give a nod to her domestic positioning, but rather saluted her commitment. The 'housewife who makes wise provision' was a housewife who understood her role, embraced it and applied herself. She was efficient and in control, she budgeted and she bargained and in return she had the satisfaction of demonstrating both her domestic loyalty and her grasp of home economics.

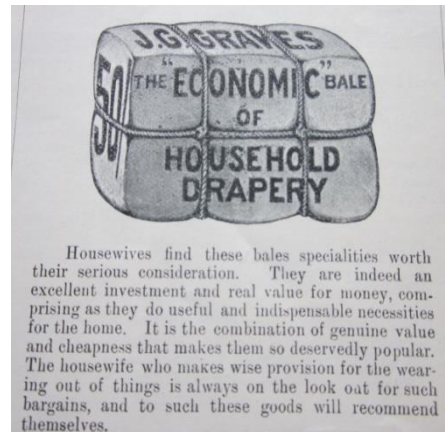


Figure 26. Multi Product Catalogue (circa 1917) Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library, Box 1. 659.133SSTF.

Similarly, *Mrs Bull's Benefit Bale* (figure 27) also advertised during the First World War, sought out the attention of the thrifty, dutiful and attentive housewife. *Mrs Bull*, a name almost certainly chosen to add a feminised twist to the satirical British character of the no-nonsense *John Bull*, secured the advertisement's gendered allegiance through a series of recognisable traits; traits that did not just include references to the title of 'Mrs'.³⁶ Aimed at the working classes, the narrative retained *Mrs Bull* at the centre of domesticity, portraying her as a grounded and focussed wartime housewife who understood her duty and was morally and stoically equipped to undertake it. Displaying her command of the household was akin to displaying her command of the home front and her image was far removed from any nuanced or feminised association with a delicate, weak or indeed inferior constitution. Jonathan Bignell's analysis of the portrayal of women in magazines (and this must include advertisements) suggests that representations are made 'meaningful because they belong to [a series of] socially accepted codes that readers recognise and [then] decode'.³⁷ While Bignell is also keen to point out that such material 'does not construct a single mythic



Figure 27. Multi Product Catalogue (circa 1917) Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library, Box 1. 659.133SSTF.

³⁶ Figure 3. Multi Product Catalogue (circa 1917) Box 1. 659.133SSTF SLSL.

³⁷ Bignell, *Media Semiotics*, p. 60.

meaning for feminine identity' and indeed readers have the 'ability to decode, diagnose and evade [any] ideologically subject-positioning' he does acknowledge the arguments of Winship, who suggests that advertising possesses an ability to 'naturalise an ideological view of what being a woman means, and overlapping with this it naturalises the consumer culture which magazines (and arguably mail order catalogues) stimulate through advertising and editorial material'.³⁸ While the women readers of Graves' advertisements may have chosen to deflect any notion of feeling ideologically positioned, the advertisements were nonetheless a ringing endorsement of what was perceived to be an ideological view of them; a view conveyed through programmes of mass communication, including the mail order trade.

Other initiatives that targeted women in the sale of domestic items and products for the home included programmes such as the Ideal Home Exhibitions. Designed to showcase the modern home, highlight the latest labour saving devices and engage women as agents of domestic modernity, the exhibitions acted as a springboard for women's enlightenment, one where consumers could navigate their way through the myriad of modern time-saving appliances and where younger women could dream and become 'educated in the skills of homemaking'.³⁹ Reinforcing the concept that home was not just a place of shelter but also an environment to nurture those values associated with a respectable lifestyle, the exhibitions also helped to establish a 'new commercial culture of homemaking'.⁴⁰ In 1929 the Ideal Home Exhibition catalogue suggested that 'the modern housewife has discovered that if she uses the correct household appliance for her work [and] if the right tool is used for every task, she can have a perfect home and [time] for leisure'.⁴¹ Indeed suggests Ryan, the modern housewife could become 'chancellor of [her] domestic economy'.⁴² The similarity of meaning behind the marketing rhetoric of retailers such as the firm of Graves and large events like the Ideal Home Exhibitions was clear. For both Graves and the visitors to the exhibition the dominant message revolved around a transformation of the housewife;

³⁸ Janice Winship cited in Bignell, *Media Semiotics*, pp. 56-62. For further reading on the subject of passive and non-passive consumers see also Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London, 1994).

³⁹ Deborah S. Ryan, 'The Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition, 1908-39' in Maggie Andrews & Mary M. Talbot (ed.), *All the World and Her Husband: Women in Twentieth Century Consumer Culture* (London, 2000), pp. 11-14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴¹ *Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition Catalogue, 1929*, p. 195, quoted in Ryan, 'The Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition', p. 16.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

from one who faced the arduous drudgery of housework to one who was essentially an aspiring, well-equipped and tooled-up manager efficiently maintaining the domestic front. Yet while Ryan argues that the exhibitions helped to forge a new 'modern identity for the housewife' she also acknowledges that they respected 'the traditions of the past' where home was not only a 'site of citizenship' but where women remained at its helm.⁴³ These consumer programmes, whether produced by the glamorous displays of the Ideal Home exhibitions, through women's magazines or through the pages of the mail order catalogues reinforced and maintained those gendered boundaries of advertising and retailing. Indeed, filling the void for consumers unable to visit the exhibitions or with little time to peruse the latest offerings in ladies magazines were the mail order catalogues, and they were just as enticing and just as profoundly gendered.

Fashion, Fripperies and Freedom: Mail Order and the Representation of Women

Perusing the company's catalogues from the comfort of the armchair gave women the space to reflect, idealise, dream, surmise, question and imagine how their homes, their dress, their recreational and their social activities could or should be. Even idealised concepts of parenting, motherhood and marital relationships could be envisaged, imagined, aimed for and explored as contemporary ideologies, values and concepts permeated the language of advertising. While the aim of this language was to sell the firm's tangible commodities, its form, structuring and construction simultaneously encouraged the consumption of these intangible and idealised concepts. From the front pages of the catalogues to the back, readers were confronted, challenged, directed and inspired to participate in these interrelated consumer activities.

Women's fashions formed a large part of the company's products and their advertising narrative involved a series of socio-cultural meanings, many of which revolved around concepts associated with respectability. The feminisation of this 'respectability' involved a plethora of characteristics such as gentleness, charm, decorum, prettiness, neatness, tidiness and beauty. In 1905 Graves featured an advertisement for women's dresses which posed the question: 'Why be Shabby?'⁴⁴ While this rhetorical question was aimed as a selling point rather than to elicit any answers, it nevertheless had the potential to raise

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-15.

⁴⁴ J. G. Graves Mail Order Catalogue, *Opportunities* (May, 1905), p. 16. Box 1. 659.133SSTF. SLSL.

dilemmas in the minds of its readers. Shabbiness elicited images of the poorer working classes: slovenly, neglectful, worn-out, dilapidated, unkempt, and outdated. A shabby appearance was a shabby lifestyle; it was not feminine, Godly, beautiful, endearing, charming or elegant. Shabbiness did not seek to emulate or aspire; neither was it sophisticated or feminine and it was certainly not associated with being attractive, socially achieving or culturally progressive. Such meanings attached to the commodity of dress were simultaneously coded to be both implicit, rooted in pre-conceived socio-cultural perceptions and constructs, and explicit, advising the woman consumer how she could divorce herself from shabbiness and its associated connotations. The advertisement was both coded and skilful; suggesting both the concept and the practice of shabbiness could be dispensed with by engaging in a programme of enlightened consumption. There was no further need to be shabby if you purchased your garments through the firm of J. G. Graves; even for customers on a low income, the firm had the solution to shabbiness: its credit system. By making the right choices the female consumer could wrap herself in a new identity, embrace all that was respectable and distance herself from any signs and signals of shabbiness. What she chose to wear and consume indicated her desire to self-improve, aspire and embrace a respectable lifestyle. As the marketing rhetoric unveiled its suggestive similes, women, the advertisement implied, could be transformed 'From the tip of [her] foot to the crown of her head' through the 'charming touches' of pelerines, ruffles, stoles, belts, blouses and scarves.⁴⁵ Indeed the firm could 'show [her] another way' to present herself; one where she could depart from any signs, signals or concepts of shabbiness.⁴⁶

While the advertisement suggested that women's consumer choices added credence to her appearance and reflected her consumer desires, it also suggested that those desires were integral to her embracement of femininity and her desire to appear respectable. Indeed while the garments were neither unique nor special, the connotations attached to them were explicitly wrapped in a constructed and gendered advertising rhetoric that sought to elicit and bind social perceptions to the tangible object. As Packard notes, astute advertisers recognised that 'nothing appeals more to people than themselves, so why not help people buy a projection of themselves'.⁴⁷ For the customers of J. G. Graves, buying such a

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*, p. 47.

projection was made even easier through the catalogues' persuasive narrative and the added incentive of payment by instalments. This ingratiating, convenient and attractive home shopping opportunity was increasingly being offered to a wider social audience of consumers and the intricate relationship between consumer, retailer and socio-cultural forces fed both desire and want. Essentially it was a tri-partite programme between, product, retailer and the narrative of a socially engineered advertising agenda. Whether the female customers conformed to such associations would be difficult to determine but a route to such conformity was certainly provided by companies such as J. G. Graves.

The firm's promotion of women's fashions was not just presented as a challenge to women's social identity (as in the use of the term shabby) but also framed its advertising programme to fit in with pre-conceived perceptions of women's bodies. Idealising shapes and sizes was reinforced both through imagery and narrative and items such as corsetry, while for some were seen as the 'antithesis of modernity' did maintain their attraction for twentieth century women consumers.⁴⁸ As Tinkler and Warsh note, once manufacturers recognised that the new woman of the century demanded more freedom of movement to participate in new forms of leisure and sporting activities, they adapted and modified their designs by



Figure 28. J. G. Graves Catalogue (circa 1900). Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. Box 2. 659.133SSTF.

using 'rustless bones and elastic thread' which maintained their 'appeal to modern womanhood'.⁴⁹ However, despite such modifications the corsets also maintained an allegiance to the concepts of femininity and the shape of the female body. An advertisement for the firm's *Contour Corset* (figure 28) embellished the product's qualities with an alluring narrative of feminine glamour as it 'commended itself to all [who] desire[d] a smart figure' and all who sought to be quickly transformed into a 'delightful, shapely and elegant' woman.⁵⁰ Overflowing with inferences and conjectures, it was an advertisement that sought the attention of the woman consumer; one conscious of body shape, image and sexual identity.

⁴⁸ Tinkler & Warsh, 'Feminine Modernity in Inter-War Britain and North America', p. 121.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Figure, 28. J. G. Graves Catalogue (circa 1900). Box 1. 659.133 SSTF. SLSL.

Stearns notes that by the early 1900s, the text of advertisements were beginning to 'embrace more value-laden phrases.'⁵¹ Unlike the 'straightforward product descriptions' and the use of 'utilitarian terms - emphasising price, durability and quality' the use of sexualised nuances such as 'alluring' and 'bewitching' were becoming increasingly attached to women's fashions.⁵² This was a period observes Stearns where women 'were being encouraged to be fashionable, smell good and shave their legs and underarms as part of escalating beauty standards'.⁵³ These connotations of beauty were not only conveyed through marketing and advertising terminology but were further emphasised through the use of artist's impressions and the use of models adopting either dreamy or alluring poses. Such marketing agendas involved large parts of the advertising media, including newspapers, magazines and mail order catalogues.⁵⁴ Indeed, as Greenfield et al note, 'articles (and this must include advertisements) on the feminine physique repeatedly warned housewives that they were in danger of losing their husbands if they [failed] to maintain their appearance'.⁵⁵ Women, it appeared, faced several contradictions in relation to their choice of dress; dress to impress, dress for social success or dress to maintain their marriage.

For the firm of J. G. Graves, honing in on and accentuating the relationship between fashion, women's appearance and concepts of beauty attracted the use of such terms as exquisite, attractive, refined, distinctive, dainty, elegant, charming and beautiful.⁵⁶ In 1929 the firm set out to market its latest range of women's dresses under the heading 'Becoming Styles'.⁵⁷ It was an advertisement filled with nuances designed to align women's identity with gentility, modesty and grace. These 'dainty little dance frocks, tastefully made' with their 'gauged waistlines' that allowed 'the fullness of the skirts' to be 'gracefully draped' were all terms chosen to reflect and echo the meanings of a genteel and feminised refinement. The value-

⁵¹ Peter N. Stearns. *Consumerism in World History: the Global Transformation of Desire* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 63 & 50.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁵⁵ Jill Greenfield, Sean O'Connell & Chris Read. 'Gender, Consumer Culture and the Middle-Class Male, 1918-39' in Alan Kidd & David Nichols (ed.), *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism: Middle Class Identity in Britain, 1800-1940* (Manchester, 1999), p.187; Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain since 1914-1959* (Basingstoke, 1992), p. 213.

⁵⁶ For examples see: J. G. Graves Catalogues, Boxes 1-3. 659.133SSTF SL SL.

⁵⁷ 'Becoming Styles' J. G. Graves Catalogue (Autumn 1929), Box 2: 659:133SSTF SL SL.

laden terms and phrases set out to portray and accentuate an idealised concept; one that not only pertained to the woman's body but also her character and her disposition. Far removed from the popular 'Flapper' fashions of the period, the dresses, whilst designed to complement the female body, also suggested that such fashions connoted signals of respectability, gentility and sophistication. In addition, while tasteful, dainty and graceful were the hook of the advertisement, its trigger was the price. The dresses, made of artificial silk rayon (a cheap and mass-produced fabric) made them more widely available and affordable than fashions made of pure silk.⁵⁸ Despite their income, more women, rather than being precluded from the purchase of these tangible products and their intangible attachments could now be included in an assumed society of taste, elegance and sophistication.

While fashions were undoubtedly changing and clothes needed to accommodate women's new lifestyles, for example their working environments and their participation in new sporting and leisure activities, fashions nevertheless continued to carry a series of social signifiers. As Valverde notes, 'dress as a social and moral signifier' had presented 'problem[s] for reformers from the early Victorian period.'⁵⁹ Indeed, the author's analysis of *Mary Barton* in which Elizabeth Gaskell's stated 'if clothes can make the fallen woman, then they can also make the honest woman', can be adapted to clarify Graves' marketing rhetoric.⁶⁰ Carefully constructing and tailoring the advertising language to fit in with the social perceptions of respectable femininity was a programme that the firm clearly understood and chose to utilise.

Women's fashion, it appears, was teeming with social connotations, implications and propositions, as were the fashion pages of J. G. Graves' catalogues. While advertising analysts such as Sinclair notes the argument that the construction of advertisements 'serve to direct or position readers to take a certain ideological meaning from them', others such as Leiss et al argue that consumers do not literally or uncritically simply absorb and accept

⁵⁸ Rayon, also known as Mother-in-Law silk became a popular fabric for the manufacturing of cheap clothes following its refinement after World War One which made the fabric less flammable. For further reading see: George B. Kauffman 'Rayon: The First Semi-Synthetic Fibre Product,' *Journal of Chemical Education*, 70: 11. p. 887 (1993).

⁵⁹ Mariana Valverde, 'The Love of Finery: Fashion and the Fallen Woman in Nineteenth Century Social Discourse', *Victorian Studies*, 32 (2), Winter 1989, p. 172.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

the contents and connotations of advertising.⁶¹ While both of these arguments add a degree of circumspection to the analysis of Graves' advertisements (particularly the conformity of consumers) there can be little doubt that the firm actively sought to marry its sales of women's clothes to a menu of respectability and feminised concepts. As Giles points out 'working-class respectability was a complex cluster of values' that not only 'embrace[d] female sexuality [and] material security [but also a] moral and emotional outlook'.⁶² The firm certainly provided a route for lower middle class and working class women to work their way through this complex cluster of values associated with the activity of consumption. Essentially, Graves ensured that its women customers could become as tastefully made and constructively feminised as her personal goals, her purse and her choices dictated.

An Appreciation of Sophistication: Language and Labels

Attaching gendered nuances to women's clothing was not the only remit occupying the firm's advertising department. The use of distinctive titles, many of which echoed with a respectable ethos, was another popular practice of the firm. English names such as the *Chatsworth* and *Kew* evening gowns, *Sandringham* and *Salisbury* dance frocks, and the stylish *Portsea*, *Pimlico* and *Padley* coats were all featured in the catalogues.⁶³ In 1932, coats bearing the titles of *Hastings*, *Eastleigh* and *Hereford* made an appearance and were shortly followed by the distinctively smart yet practical *Dover*, *Deal* and *Harrogate* two-piece outfits.⁶⁴ Neither did the company restrict its titling and labelling to its range of stylish and sophisticated fashions. Workwear also gained titles including the *Margate* Storm Coat, the *Portsmouth* Oilskin and maids' coats bearing such names as *Kitty*, *Rita* and *Nora*.⁶⁵ Interestingly the choice of names attached to the garments also reflected their socio-cultural allegiance; indeed *Kitty*, *Rita*, *Nora*, *Margate* and *Portsmouth* were not quite in the same semantic league as *Sandringham*, *Buckingham*, *Chatsworth* or *Kew*. However, in compensation to this dumbing down of the titles, the advertisements also suggested that the purchases of heavy duty women's work wear, such as Khaki Twills, dungarees, breeches and wellington boots, were obviously in addition to her other rather more delicate garments

⁶¹ Sinclair, *Images Incorporated*, p. 46. Leiss et al., *Social Communication in Advertising*, p.288.

⁶² Judy Giles, 'Playing Hard to Get: Working-class women, sexuality and respectability in Britain, 1918-40.' *Women's History Review* (1992) 1:2, p. 243.

contained in her wardrobe. Seeking to reassure the hard working woman that she still maintained a feminine identity appeared to be an important marketing strategy aimed at the working-class woman.

This interconnectedness between feminine identity and fashions was further augmented when the firm recognised the value of attaching continental names to women's clothes. Furthermore, embellishing them with an international flavour added to those connotations of refinement, sophistication, elegance and femininity. Designers operating in the early twentieth century such as Elsa Schiaparelli from Italy, Spanish born Cristóbal Balenciaga and Jacques Doucet from Paris, all designed clothes for an elite and sophisticated clientele.⁶⁶ Whilst these bespoke creations emerging from the fashion houses of Rome and Paris remained the reserve of the wealthy and fashionable elite, their unique and often exotic creations set out to complement, accentuate and heighten an awareness of the female body. Graves recognised this symbiotic relationship between fashions, femininity and continental nuances and began to invest in their symbolic meanings. Giving foreign and flamboyant names to cheaper and more affordable clothes enhanced the commodities' sophisticated appeal and simultaneously attached a romantic ethos to them. Clothes carrying names such as, *Continental*, *Cabaret*, *Boulevard*, *Cyprus* and *Cuba* all featured in the firm's catalogues and connoted a sense of continental sophistication (figure 29).⁶⁷

They embellished an exotic appeal and a continental affinity to fashion. Wearing these affordable yet imaginatively named clothes suggested a heightened



Figure 29. J. G. Graves Catalogue (Autumn, 1935). Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library Box 1.659.133SSTF.

⁶³ *Chatsworth and Kew Evening Gowns* (1929). *Sandringham and Salisbury Dance Frocks* (circa 1910). *Sandringham, Portsea, Pimlico and Padley Coats* (1929). Box 2, 659.133SSTF SLSL.

⁶⁴ *Hastings, Eastleigh and Hereford* (1932), p. 29. *Dover, Deal and Harrogate Two-Piece Outfits* (circa 1940). Box 2, 659.133 SSTF SLSL.

⁶⁵ *Margate Storm Coat & Portsmouth Oilskin* (circa 1920), *Kitty, Rita & Nora Maids Coats* (1929). Box 2, 659.133SSTF SLSL.

⁶⁶ Further information on a range of late nineteenth/early twentieth century designers can be found at: <http://www.headtotoefashionart.com/early-french-fashion-houses-19th-20th-century>. Accessed September 2015.

⁶⁷ Figure, 29. (Autumn, 1935), p. 31. Box 1, 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

awareness of femininity and an appreciation of class, style and culture. They also connected women to the wider global nuances of fashion and promoted an enhanced affiliation to the exotic, the romantic and the glamorous. In 1932, women could reveal their cultured side by sporting the elegant and dainty *Rumba* two-piece dance outfit, the stylish and tastefully designed *Le Grande Gown* or the Art Silk Lace and net *Cantata* dance frocks. Alternatively they could embrace the French chic of the distinctive *La Fontaine* gown with its georgette puffed sleeves and Broderie Anglaise bodice, or they could aspire to inspire as they danced in the silk and satin gown emboldened with the title *Inspiration*'.⁶⁸ In 1935, women could reveal their 'charm' and 'refinement' by wearing the *Cyprus* afternoon frock, the 'graceful and charming *Cuba* evening gown' or the 'distinctive and pleasing *Dantzig* dress'.⁶⁹ Other fashions echoing and inferring these continental affiliations included the *Elysees* afternoon frock, the *Etoile*, *Cluny*, *Trocadero* and *Suchet* day dresses and the *Georgia*, *La Mode* and *Gambia* summer coats (figure 30).⁷⁰



Figure 30 J. G. Graves Catalogue (Summer, 1929)
Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. Box 2.
659.133SSTF.

The constant exposure to these commodities with their intangible attachments was augmented through the mass production and regular distribution of the firm's mail order catalogues. With their enticing rhetoric, descriptive detailing, titling and imagery the advertisements became more sophisticated as they oozed with the concepts of refinement, elegance, class and style. Furthermore, through the business initiatives of firms such as J. G. Graves both the commodities and their concepts remained affordable and available to a wide audience of female consumers. As Richards argues, 'advertising spectacle was not just a set of conventions governing the representation of things, but a set of procedures [that] regulat[ed] the presentation of self in everyday life'.⁷¹ This presentation of 'self' engaged

⁶⁸ *Rumba*, *La Grande*, *Cantata*, *La Fontaine* and *Inspiration* Gown, (1932), p. 31. Box 2. 659.133SSF. SLSL.

⁶⁹ *Cyprus*, *Cuba* and *Dantzig* Dresses (Summer, 1935), Box 2, 659.133SSTF. SLSL.

⁷⁰ *Elysees*, *Etoile*, *Cluny*, *Trocadero* & *Suchet* dresses (Autumn 1929). *Georgia* and *La Mode* Coats, (Summer, 1929), p. 23. Box 2, 659.133SSTF. SLSL.

⁷¹ Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, p. 257. Richards does not appear to use the phrase 'The presentation of Self' as a reference to the work of sociologist's Erving Goffman's study of imagery

with a whole discourse of advertising narratives, marketing displays, tangible commodities and socio-cultural meanings. For women, such connotations and meanings were intended to echo the feminised concepts associated with sophistication, gentleness, charm, elegance and refinement. However, the conscientious shopper and seeker of self-presentation was not just the reserve of women; men too were targeted as a consumer audience seeking self-gratification through the activity of consumption.

Bibs, Braces and Bowler Hats: J. G. Graves and the Male Consumer

Along with other retailers, Graves recognised that the connection of consumption with the 'presentation of self' had the capacity to engage both men and women. Graves' variety of commodities was vast and the mail order company targeted its male customers just as forcibly as it did its female ones. The firm was also similarly astute when it came to applying male gendered and socially aligned advertising rhetoric, terminology and imagery. It recognised that selling items such as tools, boots, bibs and braces to the labourer, craftsman and hobbyist required a different approach to selling men's suits, overcoats and evening dress to city workers and the professional middle classes. The social allegiance of the product demanded its own careful attachment of signs and signifiers and Graves' marketing narrative selectively incorporated a range of advertising tools to connect consumer with commodity.

In 1905 the firm opened one of its advertisements for the sale of quality men's wear by using a Shakespearian quote from *Romeo and Juliet*: "Men's Eyes were meant to Look and Gaze."⁷² Intended to echo the interconnectedness between commodity, consumer and social class, this use of high-brow rhetoric was a clear demonstration of the firm's grasp of advertising rhetoric. The chosen narrative, accompanied by a series of images portraying a society of smartly dressed men on their way to the city, the office, the theatre or a fashionable restaurant oozed with the concepts of success, sophistication and style. Simultaneously it also re-endorsed man's command of the public space as it echoed with the meanings of achievement, respectability and civic pride. Embedded with concepts of

of theatre. However Goffman's study could be used to extract further analysis between the relationship of marketing rhetoric and programmes of consumption. For further reading see: Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London, 1971).

⁷² Original Shakespearian line reads; 'Men's eyes were meant to look and let them gaze'. Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*: Act 3, Scene 1. Quoted in *Opportunities*: 5, p. 4 (1903). Box 1. 659.133STF. SLSL.

social distinction and suggesting that the consumption of fashionable attire indicated the consumption of a fashionable lifestyle, the advertisement tactically embroidered its marketing narrative to target a specific audience of consumers.

Adding such items as men's quality clothing to the firm's range of products made good business sense for both the company and the consumer. It not only demonstrated its grasp of changing consumer needs, but also the company's intention to re-evaluate its profile. For Graves, mail order was a retailing outlet perfectly positioned and capable of supplying a vast array of needs, but those needs had to reflect and accommodate the changing demands of consumers. Operating during a period of change and modernisation where a rising number of lower middle class men, and particularly those white collar workers seeking to enhance their appearance though affordable yet quality fashion, gave the firm a new opportunity to augment both its products and its customer numbers. Indeed self-presentation through dress was no longer the reserve of the wealthier middle classes. Providing both choice and quality, the customers of J. G. Graves could either purchase their suits 'off the peg' or have them made through the firm's own tailoring department (figure 31).⁷³ Offered at attractive prices and available

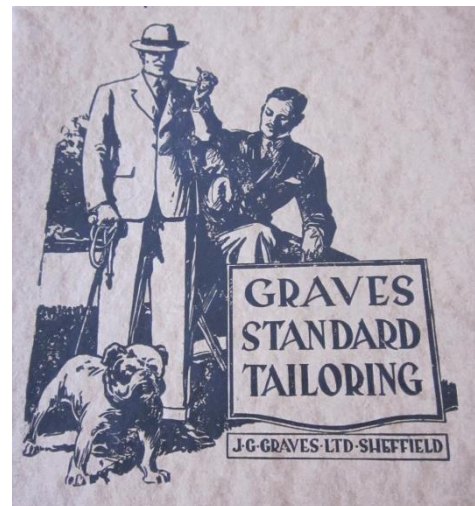


Figure 31. J. G. Graves 1930s Tailoring Service Catalogue. Courtesy Sheffield Local Studies Library. Box 2. 659.133SSTF.

through the company's deferred payment scheme, the incentives to buy were in place and these consumers of fashion could afford to adopt a dress code that was both aspiring and inspiring. While the suits were not of bespoke tailoring quality, they filled a void for men's fashions and particularly for those at the lower end of the pay scale. As Laura Ugolini observes, the provision of such suits may well have held a 'particular resonance for those

⁷³ Figure 31. J. G. Graves tailoring service catalogue for men (circa 1930s). 659.133SSTF, Box 2. 659.133SSTF SLSL. The firm provided a range of self-measurement forms with detailed instructions, fabric and style selections and offered a range of extras such as additional pockets, vented coats, choice of collars and silk facings to their garments. Examples of the forms dated from circa 1900 can be seen in the J. G. Graves Catalogue Collection, Boxes 1-3, 659.133SSTff SLSL.

men struggling at the lower end of the middle class, [whose] incomes [were] £200 or less per year' but who still wanted to dress well.⁷⁴

Graves embraced this opportunity to trade and utilised both his catalogues and a remit of secondary advertising material to attract these male consumers. In 1911, *The Quiver*, carrying an advertisement for Graves clothes, opened with the quote 'Clothes don't make the man, but they make all of him except his hands and face during business hours'.⁷⁵ Implying that the 'slovenly suit too oft proclaims the slothful mind', the article reminded its male readers that it was 'something of a duty to others' to pay attention to his appearance.⁷⁶ Paying such attention, suggested Graves, was made all the more achievable by accessing his firm's credit programme. For an initial payment of five shillings, followed by six further payments of five shillings, the 'average man' without ready cash in his pocket could make 'the most profitable sort of investment' and immediately improve his appearance.⁷⁷ These suits, the article concluded, were a demonstration of the 'excellences for which a man has ordinarily to pay more' and their cost and terms of purchase now 'left the ill-dressed man with no shadow of excuse'.⁷⁸ In the summer of 1912 the magazine *Tit-Bits* also carried a series of advertisements for men's suits sold by the firm. Both articulate and attuned to the socio-cultural rhetoric of advertising, it suggested that the friends of men wearing Graves' suits would 'notice that [he has] suddenly taken on a more successful appearance; [he finds himself] recognised with more cordiality and respect than usual and feel[s] a new confidence in [his] ability to take advantage of the opportunities of advancement which come [his] way'.⁷⁹ Symbiotically associating the clothing with concepts of social achievement, the advertisement, suggests Ugolini, not only presented a 'dominant image...of success and satisfaction' but more importantly one that would be 'endorsed by approving onlookers'.⁸⁰ Approval, endorsement, assimilation and identity were intrinsically

⁷⁴ Ugolini, 'Men, Masculinities and Menswear Advertising,' in John Benson and Laura Ugolini, (ed.), *A Nation of Shopkeepers: Five Centuries of British Retailing* (London, 2003), p. 90.

⁷⁵ *The Quiver* October 1911; 46, 12; 'British Periodicals,' p. 37. (*The Quiver* was journal established for men in 1861 by Evangelist and Temperance Movement advocate, John Cassell.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Tit-Bits* (13 July 1912) cited in Ugolini, *A Nation of Shopkeepers*, p. 93. See also *Tit Bits* (29 June 1912, 6 July, 1912), also referenced in Ugolini, *A Nation of Shopkeepers*, p. 103.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

bound to these tangible commodities; commodities which had the capacity to signal both the pursuit and the attainment of social success.

However such retailing and consumer practices also attracted its fair share of critics. In a 1930s edition of *Men Only*, a columnist for fashion argued that the mass production and sale of such suits was cheapening the look by promoting an 'increas[ed] Fordism in tailoring'.⁸¹ Advocating the relationship between tailor and customer was sacrosanct; the columnist went on to suggest that having a suit tailor-made should be a 'pleasant and leisurely rite'.⁸² Clearly the firm of J. G. Graves was determined to water down this snobbery of middle-class bespoke tailoring and circumnavigate its way around those traditional artisan practices. With prices starting at thirty shillings for, Graves' male customers at the lower end of the middle class strata were able to purchase a range of stylish yet affordable suits; suits that were fashioned and priced to fit both their pockets and their lifestyles.⁸³

The advertisements of J. G. Graves befitted a social narrative that had been steadily growing in popularity as men were being increasingly encouraged to pay more attention to their dress. In 1898 the journal, *Our Friend* had suggested that 'the study of dress is a duty and [as much of a] duty from a man's standpoint as [it is] a woman's'.⁸⁴ The following year, the journal, *The Young Man* (produced by the Young Men's Christian Association) argued that men failing to pay attention to their personal appearance may be 'reasonably conclude[d] to be loose and disorderly in his mental habits'.⁸⁵ A year later *Our Friend* once again reinforced this increasing relationship between men's choice of dress and displays of respectability, suggesting that 'to look well is part of the debt one owes to Society [and] men as well as women owe something to [that] society'.⁸⁶ This marrying of commodities with concepts embraced a narrative that was simple, straightforward and gendered. While commodities aimed at women tuned into a feminised or domesticated narrative, those aimed at men tuned into a social discourse revolving around respectability, civic engagement and personal

⁸¹ *Men Only* (April 1936), quoted in Greenfield et al., 'Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism', p. 188.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Example of price taken from an advertisement for a man's Cavendish suit, circa 1900. J. G. Graves catalogue circa 1905. Box 1, 659.133SSTF SLSL.

⁸⁴ "Our Friend, the Rival Fashion" (July 1898: 23) quoted in Brent Shannon: 'Refashioning Men: Fashion, Masculinity and the Cultivation of the Male Consumer in Britain, 1860-1914. *Victorian Studies*, 46.4, (summer, 2004), p. 606.

⁸⁵ *The Young Man* (October, 1889), quoted in Ugolini, *A Nation of Shopkeepers*, p. 92.

⁸⁶ "The Personal Element: A Sermon on a Text" *Fashion* (January 1900: 19), quoted in Shannon, 'Refashioning Men', p. 606.

accomplishment. As Shannon and Garvey note, advertisers seeking to 'court male consumers' were advised to engage with a narrative that was clear, brisk and direct' as advertisers strongly believed that men responded best to a 'business style' approach.⁸⁷

The evidence emerging from the early advertisements of Graves and other associated marketing material such as *The Quiver*, *The Young Man* and *Tit-bits* confirms that this structured and gender orientated language of advertising was certainly popular amongst retailers. As Greenfield et al's exploration of early men's magazines observes, the fashion advice given out to male readers 'framed [their] depiction of gender identities within recognisably traditional models of masculinity'.⁸⁸ Consumption for men, and indeed any associated advertising aimed at men, had to carefully observe the rules and roles of separate spheres. Men's consumer habits had not only to be divorced from the 'plague of feminism that had allegedly afflicted Britain since 1918' but had also to demonstrate control and rationality, unlike the habits of female consumers, who it was suggested, were inclined to be 'faddish, gullible and 'irrational'.⁸⁹ In contrast to women, the characteristics of male shoppers were apparently reflected in their choice of attire. 'The day had gone' suggested *Men Only* when 'man prided himself on wearing any old thing - consider the really successful men of your own profession - they are not stupidly dressy but they do know what to wear and they can mix easily in any circles'.⁹⁰

Greenfield et al suggests that the fashion coverage in men's magazines 'emphasised a very particular model of masculinity, one that was very English, undoubtedly metropolitan and clearly middle class'.⁹¹ Yet it was not just the glossy publications contained in men's magazines that reflected such meanings and messages but retailers such as J. G. Graves, who studiously aligned their commodities and advertising rhetoric to support the sought after and desired lifestyle of this male consumer audience. For Ugolini, this 'desire to look like a gentleman (which advertisements promised to fulfil) cannot be explained simply in terms of social emulation and a desire to ape the fashions of those higher in the social

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 601. See also Ellen G. Garvey. *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York, 1996), p. 181.

⁸⁸ Greenfield et al., 'Gender, Consumer Culture and the Middle-Class Male', p. 186.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 187-188.

⁹⁰ *Men Only* (December, 1935) quoted in Greenfield et al., 'Gender, Consumer Culture and the Middle-Class Male', p. 188.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

hierarchy'.⁹² It was also about 'embody[ing] a lifestyle' and signalling one's engagement with the practices and programmes of respectability.⁹³ It was about appearance and their meanings; meanings which could be conveyed through the consumption of the tangible commodity. For the middle class white collar worker it was about embracing an identity and demonstrating that identity. It was about the presentation of self. As Winship argues, there was a definitive relationship between choice of dress and white collar/blouse employment, with dress indicating both who a man was and who he definitely was not.⁹⁴

Defining this identity was an anxious time for this new social hybrid of consumers. Many of these lower middle-class men were not only navigating their way around new occupational structures and new demands of the workplace but were also experimenting with a new and exciting way of life. While they were at the heart of this blurring of social boundaries they were still in the experimental phase of growth and development. As Price argues, these new white collar workers were only too well aware of their tenuous position and the 'perils that waited slippage down the social scale'.⁹⁵ Developing their own identity and their own meanings of self-esteem was not without its anxieties, but neither was it without encouragement and support.⁹⁶ Between the periods of 1860-1914, Shannon suggests that there was a 'transformation in retailing and consumer practices [which was] 'nothing less than a revolution' as fashions became increasingly 'available and desired by all male Britons'.⁹⁷ While this 'revolution' may be a slight exaggeration, the rise of firms such as J. G. Graves did play its part in what was a changing programme of consumer practices. The collaboration between retailers, savvy advertisers and these consumers helped to forge and shape this identity, but the activities of these tri-partite efforts did so while retaining and reinforcing the gendered alliances between men and the public space. Through the mass production of ready-made clothes, offers of a cheap tailoring service, programmes of credit and the marketing prowess of firms such as J. G. Graves, the lower middle class male could attune his dress code to one that suited both his pocket and his lifestyle.

⁹² Ugolini, 'Men, Masculinities and Menswear Advertising', p. 92.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Janice Winship. 'New disciplines for women and the rise of the chain store,' in Andrews & Talbot, *All the World and Her Husband*, p. 30.

⁹⁵ Richard N. Price, 'Society, Status and Jingoism: The Social Roots of Lower Middle Class Patriotism, 1870-1900,' in Geoffrey Crossick (ed.), *The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 1870-1914* (London, 1977), p. 99.

⁹⁶ For further information on advertising and consumer anxieties see: Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*, chapter 5.

⁹⁷ Shannon, 'Refashioning Men', p. 597.

Titles, Labels and the Concepts of Class

In similar style to women's fashions, the company of Graves added credence to its men's fashions by embellishing them with titles and labels. Names such as *Mayville*, *Saville*, *Kingsway*, *Beaufort*, *Westminster*, *Holborn*, and *Cavendish* all appeared on clothes aimed at the aspiring middle class male consumer (figure's 32 & 33).⁹⁸ Alluding to the brigade of gentlemanly capitalists who had achieved success in the metropole's financial sector, they maintained their firm command of the masculinised public space.⁹⁹



Figure 32. J. G. Graves Catalogues (1939) Courtesy of Sheffield Locals Studies Library. Box 3 659.133SSTF.



Figure 33. J. G. Graves Catalogues (1939) Courtesy of Sheffield Locals Studies Library. Box 3 659.133SSTF.

The labels were a clear example of advertising's use of semantics and nuances. Aiming to associate the fashions with an upper-class lifestyle, the titles attempted to echo the concepts of sophistication, success and class. In this complex world of consumer practices, men were being exposed to the ingratiating marketing tactics in similar style to women; the only difference being, suggests Greenfield et al, was that their menu of 'gratification' was 'often derived from acquisitions that expressed their success in the masculine world of commerce'.¹⁰⁰ Graves not only accepted this gendered alignment of marketing tactics but

⁹⁸ Figure 32 (August 1939) p. 14. Box 2, 659.133SSTF. SLSL. *Cavendish* Suit (circa 1901); *Westminster*, *York* and *Mayfair* suits appeared in the men's fashion catalogue, 1939; 'Correct styles for wear' (1932); Stylish suits for youths and boys (circa 1902), 659.133SSTF.

⁹⁹ The term, *Gentlemanly Capitalists* was introduced by the business historians, Peter Cain and Anthony G. Hopkins who argued that a new imperialism was driven by the landed interests and financial sector of the City of London and who had succeeded the provisional industrial capitalists. For further reading, see: Peter, J. Cain & Anthony G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (London, 1993).

¹⁰⁰ Greenfield et al, 'Gender, Consumer Culture and the Middle-Class Male', p. 185.

embraced and exploited it through the vagaries and vogues of men's fashions. Furthermore, such exploitation also steered its course into fashions aimed at youths and boys. While images of young men carrying books and wearing the *Harrow* outfit connoted a sense of impending success, teenagers sporting their *Sandringham* or *Rugby Suit* connoted the future aspirations of the young social climber, aspirer and achiever (figure 34).¹⁰¹ Other names making an appearance in boys clothing included *Leamington*, *Norfolk* and *Creswick* (circa 1900), *Renown*, and *Reading* (1931) and *Malven*, *Wyngrove*, *Westwood* and *Wallace* (1932).¹⁰² These off-the-peg clothes may not have carried the genteel refinement of those commissioned and sold by high class tailors, but in similar context to the labelling of women's clothes their titles were engineered to impart a desired social connotation. While aligning products with these semantic affiliations was popular, retailers were also aware that such labels also needed to reflect the known and the contemporary. For example, while in the early 1900s, Graves sold boy's fashions sporting such names as *Cadet*, *Sandringham* and *Military*, by the Second World War the titles reflected the more popular narratives of *Victor* and *Spitfire*.¹⁰³



Figure 34. J. G. Graves fashions for boys (circa 1920s) Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. Box 2. 659.133STF.

Connecting clothing and other commodities with the meanings of conflicts, wars and messages of patriotism was nothing new and often added to their masculinisation. As Shannon points out, associating a product with the 'Spartan and heroic life of the soldier' was both productive for retailers and popular with consumers.¹⁰⁴ The firm of Graves certainly recognised this relationship and the advantages of tapping into contemporary events and/or social discourse to popularise its goods. The use of symbolic terminology such as *Spitfire*, *Sandringham*, *Rugby* and *Harrow* were not only masculine but also socially aligned to portray and project images of officers and gentlemen. Indeed the labelling was

¹⁰¹ Figure, 34. J. G. Graves fashions for boys (circa 1920). 659.133STF. Box 2. SL5L.

¹⁰² Leamington, Norfolk, Creswick, (Circa 1900), Box 1. Malven, Wyngrove, Westwood (1932), Wallace, (1932), Renown, Reading, Spring, (1931), Box 2. 659.133STF. SL5L.

¹⁰³ Military and Cadet Suit (circa 1900) J. G. Graves Catalogue, Box 1. Victor Suit (Autumn, 1943), Box 2. Spitfire Raincoat, J. G. Graves Clothing Catalogue (1943), Box 2, 659.133STF. SL5L.

¹⁰⁴ Shannon, 'Refashioning Men', p. 602. For further discussion on the association between conflicts, contemporary events and commodities see chapter five, J. G. Graves: A Dutiful Servant of Empire.

engineered and chosen to connote a particular meaning; in this context they were designed to reflect the images of the commander and not the commanded. This is not to say that the firm diluted its use of advertising nuances for commodities aimed at the manual labourer. Rather, it attuned its marketing language to comply with a social and culturally constructed affiliation between the commodity and its intended consumer. Indeed the firm tailored its marketing terminology as keenly as it tailored its fashions.

Sahlins argues that 'goods stand as an object code for signification and valuation of persons and occasions, functions and situations'.¹⁰⁵ Attracting the labouring classes, whether skilled, un-skilled or semi-skilled, demanded its own advertising language and one that signified both the quality of the product and the perceived characteristics of its consumer. The firm of Graves understood this consumer audience well; indeed it had its roots in the sales of pocket watches, bibs, braces, boiler suits, heavy duty boots and tools aimed at manual workers, railway and factory employees, adventurers and travellers, miners, the police force and military personnel. All of these occupations had featured in a series of classified newspaper advertisements and the commodities were systematically aligned to associate the commodity with the concepts of strength, tenacity, endurance and bravery.¹⁰⁶ Heavy duty boots were one such item that attracted a menu of nuanced labelling, and names such as *Defender*, *Patrol*, *Fearnought* and *Defiance* were all used to convey images of toil, hard-work, industry and heavy labour (figure 35).¹⁰⁷ It was a language certainly more akin to the portrayal of gunners, gaiters and galoshes than that used to sell fashions to the smart suited and buffed booted city worker.



Figure 35 J. G. Graves Men' footwear (circa 1938) Courtesy Sheffield Local Studies Library. 659.133STF. Box 2.

¹⁰⁵ Marshall Sahlins quoted in Anne M. Cronin. *Advertising Myths: The Strange Half-lives of Images and Commodities* (London, 2004), pp. 79-80.

¹⁰⁶ Examples of these advertisements can be seen in editions of newspapers including *The Western Times*, (November, 1, 1905), p. 3 and *The Manchester Courier* (November 1, 1905).

¹⁰⁷ Figure 35, J. G. Graves Footwear Catalogue (1938), Box 2, 659.133STF. SLSL.

While Campbell suggests that ‘gratification obtained from the use of a product cannot be separated from the images and ideas with which it is linked’, Fitzgerald and Arnott argue that the ‘mere exposure [to advertising] can influence attitude and purchase choices’.¹⁰⁸ The mail order firm of J. G. Graves clearly understood this advertising psychology and attaching images, ideas and symbolic references to influence purchases were not just reserved for clothing and fashionable attire. Operating in the centre of Sheffield, Graves tapped into the town’s heritage of tool manufacturing and these commodities formed a large part of the firm’s sales programme. While advertised for their price and quality, the tools, like the clothes also attracted this alignment between character, commodity and identity. In the 1930s, the firm produced a separate catalogue to sell its range of tools and while the commodities filled the pages, the front cover complete with the portrayal of a proud workman surveying his empire echoed with a series of symbolic meanings (figure 36).¹⁰⁹

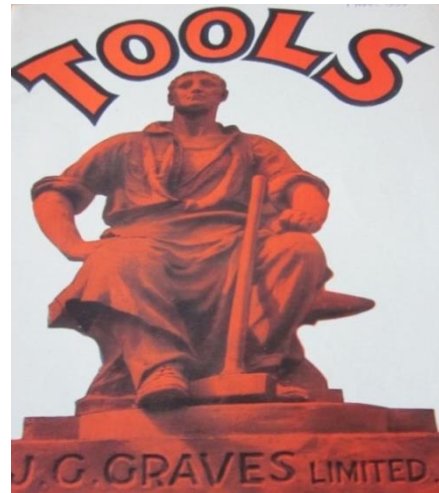


Figure 36. Front Cover of J. G. Graves Tool Catalogue (circa 1930s) Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. Box 4. 659.133SSTF.

Designed to associate strength and tenacity with craftsmanship and quality, the image cemented the British workman’s character, his identity and the command of his trade. His stance, appearance and grasp of his tools were a powerful representation of strength, resilience, stoicism and fortitude. The image was also an attempt to signal the unification of a nation attempting to re-build their lives following the end of the First World War. As Levy argues, products are not just recognised as practical items but are also ‘recognised as psychological things, as symbolic of personal attributes and goals [and] as [symbols] of social patterns and strivings’.¹¹⁰ Whether the use of such iconic imagery, labelling and descriptive semantics did influence the consumer to buy would be difficult to determine. However, the company’s engagement with these tools of advertising, including the use of socially

¹⁰⁸ Maureen Fitzgerald & David Arnott, *Marketing Communication* (London, 2000), p. 186. Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, 1989), p. 48.

¹⁰⁹ Figure 36, Front cover of one of the firm’s tool Catalogues (circa 1930s) Box 4, 659.133SSTF SLSL.

¹¹⁰ Sidney J. Levy quoted in Leiss, Kline & Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising*, p. 290. See also: Sidney J. Levy. ‘Symbols by Which We Buy’ *Advancing Marketing Efficiency*, L. H. Stockman (ed.), American Marketing Association (Chicago, 1969).

engineered and heavily gendered rhetoric demonstrated its capacity to produce a well-focussed advertising programme.

In summary, attracting and maintaining the attention of customers involved a socially structured, engineered and gendered advertising programme. The successful sale of commodities demanded that they be gendered, sexualised or socially affiliated, and preferably all three. Such affiliation was recognised by retailers and advertisers and their marketing programmes systematically engaged with and promoted this interconnectedness through their use of advertising tools; tools which varied from the use of language hooks, codes and triggers to romanticised and constructed imagery. For women, gentility, sophistication, domesticity and the home remained the main connection between commodity and consumption and their attached marketing nuances, whether soft or explicit, maintained that relationship. As such, commodities aimed at the female audience remained coded within a pre-conceptualised and idealised gendered advertising discourse. For men the advertising discourse continued to reinforce their occupancy of the public sphere and command of the civic space. The marketing narrative also maintained this gendered approach when it sought the attention of the rising lower middle classes. Recognising their needs and reflecting those needs within a socially attuned advertising programme did not appear difficult for the firm. Indeed its marketing literature appeared to reflect the same gendered and social interconnectedness that was also being popularised in other literature such as men's magazines. Supplying the smart suit, the crisp shirt and the polished shoes to this growing consumer audience gave the firm an opportunity to augment its products, its profits and its profile. It also gave those white collar consumers on a limited budget an opportunity to consume the commodity and its associated concepts.

Graves' engagement in this engineered and gendered advertising programme did not encompass anything new or unique. Such concepts attached to sales and conveying gendered roles, spaces and places had been adhered to the activity of consumption over generations. What was new was the firm's ability to maintain and sustain this interconnectedness through the production of its mail order catalogues. Arguably the pages of the catalogues acted as a conduit, both reinforcing and reaffirming those gendered spaces and places. While historians, advertising and marketing analysts will continue to debate over retailing's persuasive abilities and their capacity to ingratiate and reinforce

concepts, the evidence from the firm of J. G. Graves clearly demonstrates its willingness to try. Whether customers bought into this marketing ideology and consumed both the product and its meanings would be difficult to determine. However there is compelling evidence to argue that the firm of J. G. Graves maintained the status quo of gendered advertising.

Chapter Five

J. G. Graves: A Dutiful Servant of Empire?

The establishment of J. G. Graves' mail order company in the mid-1890s occurred during a period of British imperial prowess and expansion. Imperial rhetoric remained high on the political agenda, spurred on by events such as the Anglo-German partition of the Cameroons (1892), the occupation of Matabeleland (1894), the re-naming of Zambezi to Rhodesia (1895), the conquest of Northern Nigeria (1903) and the Union of South Africa in 1909.¹ In addition, concerns for the stability of Britain's empire were further amplified when in 1904, the Cabinet Defence Committee, re-named the Committee of Imperial Defence, undertook responsibility for maintaining programmes of cooperation between Britain's self-governing colonies and the imperial metropolis, including cooperation in trade.² These trading agendas were also augmented by the granting of a royal charter to Rhodes' British South Africa Company in 1889 (which secured British interests north of Limpopo and Zambezi) and the development of imperial business affiliations such as the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in 1909. As Cain points out 'by 1914, the British Empire had become a global phenomenon of immense economic and cultural diversity and by far the largest, most populous and most prosperous of the European Imperial domains'.³

Whilst these political debates, colonial conquests and the economic implications of empire may or may not have appeared remote or ambiguous to Britain's consumers, their imperial consciousness was kept alert through a series of public events and programmes. Empire exhibitions in 1851, 1862, 1886, 1888, 1901, 1911, 1924 all attempted to interconnect programmes of consumption with an imperial ideology, as did the introduction of Empire Day (1904) and the establishment of the Empire Marketing Board (1926).⁴ Added to these

¹ For further information on the growth of Britain's Empire see: Denis Judd, *Empire: The British Imperial Experience from 1765 to the Present* (London, 1996); Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1990); Peter Cain & Antony Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (London, 1993); Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1983* (London, 1984).

² Judd, *Empire: The British Imperial Experience*, pp. 189-190.

³ Peter Cain, 'Economics and Empire,' in Porter, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, p. 31.

⁴ For further information on Empire Day and the Empire Exhibitions, see: John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester, 1984), pp. 231-248 & 97-120; John M. Mackenzie, 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures', in Porter, *The Oxford history of the British Empire*, pp. 282-284; Judd, *Empire: The British Imperial Experience*, pp. 11, 209 & pp. 273-286; Peter Burroughs, 'Imperial

publicly attuned messages were the works of composers such as Edward Elgar. Commissioned to write emotive and atmospheric musical scores to signify the grandeur of Britain's Empire, his composition the 'Empire March' (also referred to as the British Empire March) won great acclaim when it made its debut at the opening of the 1924 British Empire exhibition.⁵ This proliferation of events, activities, institutions and political and fiscal policies ensured that the meanings of empire were not only diverse, engaging and dynamic, but continually reinforced matters of empire and Britain's imperial mission into the public's consciousness, including the consciousness of consumers.

Maintaining this interconnection between empire and the consuming public was not just the remit of politicised organisations such as the Empire Marketing Board, the development of empire shopping weeks or grand imperial exhibitions, but also the activities of individual retailers and advertisers.⁶ Attempting to augment sales and simultaneously encourage the consuming public to purchase something new, retailers sought to popularise the consumption of imperially related products, including items such as tea (and tea drinking implements), spices, oriental ware and exotically printed fashions. Such practices were not only designed to encourage wider sales but also endorsed the message that consumption with its imperially fed interconnectedness was every consumer's concern and not the reserve of the few.

These interrelated issues of empire, the economy, consumption, business endeavours and matters of retailing have attracted attention from a wealth of disciplines. While historians such as Robinson and Gallagher, Cain and Hopkins and Bernard Porter have explored the economics and business activities of empire, Andrew Porter has explored the complexity of missionary enterprises, religious settlements and slavery's association with empire.⁷ Similarly empire's connection with retailing, consumption and advertising has attracted a diverse array of analyses and scrutiny. De Groot's research has revealed how metropolitan

Institutions and the Government of Empire', in Porter, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, p. 183; Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, pp. 120-167.

⁵ The Elgar Empire March, <http://www.goodmusicpublishing.co.uk/info/default.aspx?id=GMCL164>. Accessed July 2017. See also: Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 110.

⁶ For further information concerning Empire Shopping Week See: Kaori O'Connor, 'The King's Christmas Pudding: Globalisation, Recipes and the Commodities of Empire', *Journal of Global History*, 4:1 (2009), p. 139.

⁷ Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*; Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850-1983* (Essex, 1984); Ronald Robinson & John Gallagher, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *Economic History Review*, vol. 1 (2nd ed., 1953); Porter, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, pp. 198-247.

lives were lived in the everyday presence of colonial products, which she suggests not only held their own cultural meanings but were implicitly linked to matters of patriotic consumption.⁸ Mackenzie has identified what was an intensive and interlocking relationship between retailing, the empire and the stimulation of consumer desires through advertising, film, television and literature.⁹ While Ramamurthy has explored the relationship between advertising and the representation of the colonial other, Williamson and O'Barr have engaged with the nuances of advertising language, and Falk and Campbell have demonstrated the mysterious and exotic side of empire attached to imperial exhibitions produced by department stores.¹⁰ Twells has noted how global missionary work impacted on the social, religious and political domestic front and Midgely's extensive analysis on empire, women, slavery and gender leads the field in this area of research.¹¹

Whilst this interconnectedness between empire, trade and consumption has attracted such a wealth of attention, the imperially interactive activities of British mail order, despite their distinctive, unique and ubiquitous marketing programmes have been largely ignored. It is the intention of this chapter to redress this imbalance by exploring how the mail order firm of J. G. Graves connected and engaged with Britain's empire, promoted its trade and endorsed an imperial ideology. It will begin by exploring the early establishment of Graves' company during a period of political unrest and calls for preferential tariff reforms. It will explore how the programme of mail order made foreign sales accessible and how a modernising transport system aided mail order's ability to grasp a network of colonial sales. The chapter will then go on to explore how the firm sought to maintain an efficient and effective overseas trading programme through the introduction of its Colonial and Foreign Department. It will analyse how this department added credence to the firm's retailing programme and will argue that its introduction had the added dimension of providing J. G. Graves with a platform to further echo support for the British Empire.

⁸ Joanna De Groot, 'Metropolitan Desires and Colonial Connections' pp. 166-190.

⁹ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*.

¹⁰ Anandi Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders: Images of Africa and Asia in British Advertising* (Manchester, 2003); Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements*; William M. O'Barr, *Culture and the Advertisement: Exploring Otherness in the World of Advertising* (Oxford, 1994); Falk & Campbell, *The Shopping Experience*.

¹¹ Alison Twells, *The Civilising Mission*; Clare Midgley, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790-1865* (London, 2007); Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (Oxford, 1992); Clare Midgley, *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester, 1998); Clare Midgley, *Women, Migration and Empire* (Stoke, 1996); Clare Midgley, Alison Twells, Julie Carlier, *Women in Transnational History: Connecting the Local and the Global* (London, 2016).

Evaluating this rhetoric of imperial support will continue by exploring the firm's marketing literature. It will analyse how the firm married its marketing narrative and foreign sales to concepts of home and British domesticity and will argue that its service to the colonies involved more than just the sale of tangible commodities. It will also explore how J. G. Graves used the production of the firm's catalogues to echo his own personal sentiments in relation to the second Boer War, including his support for British troops and his criticism of the government and its policies.

Following this discussion the chapter will concentrate on the firm's advertising agenda and its ability to attach imperial concepts, persuasions and representations to goods and marketing narratives. It will explore the choice of rhetoric used in the titling and labelling of commodities and will discuss how the use of imagery, language and a product's design all presented the firm with an ability to transmit a wealth of imperially related meanings and messages. Within this context the chapter will also evaluate children's toys, games and books, all of which were sold by the company and had the capacity to promote an awareness of separate identities and cultural differences through the activity of play.

Finally the chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of Graves' civic activity and its relationship to matters of empire. It will analyse his role on the civic stage and his use of the public platform to echo his support for empire. It will demonstrate the businessman's acute political and imperial awareness concerning the changing nature of empire through the adoption of the Commonwealth initiative and will argue that Graves' attention to imperial matters complied with both the narratives of the new while simultaneously echoing the characteristics of the old.

Business and Politics: Trading with the Empire

J. G. Graves was far from naïve when it came to matters of global sales and any study without reference to his programme of overseas trade and particularly that connected to Britain's empire would be incomplete. As a fledgling business man, Graves had made his first mail order sale to a customer residing in one of Britain's colonies: Australia. It was this sale that had spurred him on to pursue a business of mail order trading. In addition, the company was establishing itself in terms of both profitability and consumer popularity during a period of marketing and manufacturing unrest, much of which revolved around

issues of trade and empire. Arguments concerning the tide of foreign imports and the dumping of surplus stock were often blamed for the demise of some of Britain's manufacturing quarters. Subsequently these arguments augmented the calls for preferential and protective tariffs for the colonies and dominions and divided the political parties. As Chamberlain's Conservative followers argued that Britain's future prosperity remained dependent upon the growth of great empires and federations, the Liberals, in opposition, fervently echoed a series of anti-imperial sentiments and supported the continuation of free trade.¹² Graves, an astute businessman with the intention of securing a profitable retailing outlet was all too well aware of these unremitting political debates and agendas. Indeed such arguments were more than prominent within Sheffield's own local political arena. As noted by Lloyd-Jones and Lewis, the pro-protection newspaper the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* had in 1899 suggested that the dilemmas facing British manufacturing could be explained by examining the success of their American counterparts who could 'put down expensive machinery without fear that their production [would] be checked by hostile tariffs'.¹³ Four years later in 1903 Lord Rosebery on a visit to Sheffield argued that the introduction of protective tariffs, far from binding the Empire together, would result in 'constant jars, bickering and jealousies'.¹⁴ Similarly, Sheffield MP Frederick Mappin suggested that the continuation of free trade was 'vital to the Empire' and Alderman Clegg, a popular civic and political figure, associated the advent of free trade with the city's increase in 'prosperity, wealth, population' and progress.¹⁵

Rosebery's opinions had been aired at a meeting at Sheffield's Albert Hall which the editor of the popular journal the *Review of Reviews* had attended. It was whilst at this meeting that the editor of the popular journal the *Review of Reviews* met John George Graves, after

¹² Cain & Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, pp. 202-225.

¹³ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* (22 February, 1899), quoted in: Roger Lloyd-Jones & Myrddin Lewis, *British Industrial Capitalism since the Industrial Revolution* (London, 2003), p. 109. See also: Roger Lloyd-Jones & Myrddin Lewis, 'Business structure and political economy in Sheffield: the metal trades 1880-1920,' in: Clive Binfield (ed.), *The History of the City of Sheffield, 1843-1993*, Volume 2: Society, (Sheffield, 1993); Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2009).

¹⁴ Frederick Callis, 'Sheffield Under Free Trade: Extraordinary Progress in Population, Wealth and Influence: Startling Facts For Thinking Men,' *The Liberal League Sheffield Branch* (Promotional Literature) *Sheffield Independent Press* (1903), p. 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

which he went on to visit a series of Graves' business premises and wrote his lengthy article, 'The Largest Mail Order Business in Britain'.¹⁶

Heralding Graves as a resourceful businessman, the article not only described Graves' firm as 'an object lesson of up-to-date enterprise', but also wrote in some detail about Graves' early fight to revitalise Britain's watch trade in the face of foreign imports, and particularly those from America.¹⁷ In recognition of this fight the editor went on to note the company's continued involvement and support for British concerns. He also suggested that not only were the firm's catalogues 'eagerly welcomed [throughout] Britain's colonies', but its marketing literature made for 'one of the most convenient works of reference available for the foreign and colonial trade'.¹⁸ Graves' business acumen meant that he had quickly recognised that a global trading plan, with the country's empire at its heart, would be a profitable and productive business move.

While the advocates and adversaries of empire plied their own political views upon both the public and the business world, entrepreneurs such as J. G. Graves formed their own business strategies to secure overseas sales. Although, Graves had to ensure that any overseas trade remained cost effective and allowed for the added costs of administration, transportation and communication, he had recognised that an efficiently run mail order company such as his was in an enviable position when it came to promoting a programme of overseas sales. Firstly, the advantages of warehouses and depots ensured that a vast and diverse array of commodities could be easily stored ready for immediate dispatch. Secondly attracting an audience of overseas customers could be engineered through the wide distribution of the company's catalogues and other supplementary advertising material. Thirdly, the production of the company's own advertising material allowed it to be versatile and remain current. By observing changing trends, fashions and technological advancements and by offering the same credit payments to overseas customers as those at home, the firm made its products and methods of consumption both popular and appealing. Added to these incentives was the growing availability of a modernising global transport system. Shipping opportunities afforded by Britain's busy ports were added to by efficient

¹⁶ *Review of Reviews*, (November, 1903).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 531-533.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* For reference to global and colonial trade see page 541.

rail links across the Asian continent. As Porter acknowledges, by the early 1900s 'one-tenth of the entire trade of the British Empire passed through India's seaports' and at the centre of this trade, suggests Schneer, were the London docks whose hive of busy activity represented the 'heart of the empire'.¹⁹ Indeed, Wilson suggests that by 1914 Britain was enjoying 'the existence of a highly-developed distribution and mercantile network involving both domestic and overseas trade'.²⁰ These retailing opportunities gave companies such as J. G. Graves the ability to exploit the economies of scale by adapting their agenda to engage with a programme of foreign sales. However, trading on a global scale brought its own challenges and seeking to maintain the firm's reputation as a competitive and efficient retailer required it to adopt a new level of administration.

A Modernising Approach: The Service and Foreign Department of J. G. Graves

In 1903 the mail order catalogues produced by the firm of J. G. Graves were described as 'the one great shop window... into which all the world [could] look'.²¹ That world, boasted the company, was both wide and vast and reportedly included customers from as far afield as France, Germany, Russia, Turkey, Sweden, Iceland, China and America. However, it was its service to the empire's colonies and dominions, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, East and West Indies, India, Ceylon, South and West Africa, Newfoundland and the South Sea Islands, which made for the company's real boasts.²² Overseeing such a large operation fell to the remit of the company's Service and Foreign Department. Established during the early 1900s and also sometimes referred to as the Foreign and Colonial Section, its introduction was a clear indication of the company's determination to enter into a programme of global and especially imperial sales.²³ By 1902 this specialised section was reported to be employing a staff of twenty six correspondents and book-keepers responsible for overseeing and executing foreign orders, which, the firm implied, amounted to around 2,000 each month.²⁴ Indeed, boasted the firm, the department's employees were

¹⁹ Porter, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, p. 441; Jonathan Schneer, 'London's Docks in 1900: The Nexus of Empire', *Labour History Review*, Vol. 59: 3 (Winter 1994), p. 20.

²⁰ Wilson, *British Business History*, p. 88.

²¹ *Review of Reviews* (November, 1903), p. 541.

²² 'On Special Service: How we Supply His Majesty's Forces', *Opportunities* (circa 1902), Box 1. 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

²³ Evidence of the exact date the department was established is unavailable, however it was reported as an active section by 1902 in an edition of *Opportunities*. Box 1. 659.133 SSTF, SLSL.

²⁴ 'On Special Service'.

‘experts at their particular business [and] brimful of knowledge of tariffs, freight, shipment procedures [and] customs embargoes’.²⁵

The department’s introduction was a sensible move. It was also innovative, particularly when compared to the activities of much larger mail order firms, including its American counterpart, Sears Roebuck. As Emmet and Jeuck note, ‘Sears International’ (an additional and segregated section of the Sears Company) only formed its international department for the ‘purpose of export trade’ in 1934.²⁶ This late entry and attempt to attract the attention of the foreign market was the first time the company had broadened its marketing vision since attempting to sell sewing machines to the Mexican market in the early 1900s.²⁷ Similarly little evidence exists to demonstrate that Graves’ domestic competitors showed an early enthusiasm for overseas sales. Evidence that the Kay’s mail order enterprise attempted to initiate a programme of global sales is scant, although its purchase of foreign manufactured goods does appear to figure in its business operations.²⁸ However, while in 1907 the Fattorinis’ operations still appeared to be concentrating their early efforts upon domestic sales (particularly through its Northern Trading Company in Bradford), it had by 1910 adopted the title, Empire Stores.²⁹ While for customers, the change in title may have suggested its intention to trade with the empire, this name change was actually unconnected with a global trading programme. As noted in chapter one of this thesis, ironically the new title was the suggestion by the Registrar of Companies who refused their original application to trade under the name of ‘Northern Trading Stores’.³⁰ Despite this unconnected activity, there is evidence to suggest that the firm did attempt to trade globally. Making reference to the company’s premises in Kirkgate, Bradford, the firm highlighted its use of office space, part of which had been given over to deal with its ‘foreign trade’ with the intention to offer its services throughout ‘all parts of the globe’.³¹ However while its name change reflected its association with empire, there was little mention of the firm developing a clear association with Britain’s empire and associated consumers.

²⁵ *Opportunities*, No. 15 (circa 1905). Box 1. 659.133 SSTF. SLSL.

²⁶ Emmet & Jeuck, *Catalogues and Counters*, p. 500.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Mills, *Kays of Worcester*, p. 17. Mills notes that the firm boasted of its manufacturing operations in Berlin, Paris and Switzerland, however the author also concedes that such evidence is suspect.

²⁹ Beaver, *A Pedlar’s Legacy*, pp. 45-53.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

Comparing the evidence from these alternative mail order companies suggests that Graves was both forward thinking in his approach to global sales and particularly those involving the empire. The evidence also adds a degree of both controversy and clarity to the arguments of business historians, Alfred D. Chandler and John E. Wilson. For Chandler, the success of commanding the markets both at home and abroad required the adoption of a new business approach which, he argued, had often been lacking by British business concerns since the Second Industrial Revolution'.³² For Chandler, a three-pronged investment strategy involving the key areas of production, marketing/distribution and management were the 'logic of industrial growth'.³³ However whilst Chandler suggests British firms were reluctant to embrace such modernising approaches, Wilson rightly advocates caution in the use of such broad generalisations.³⁴ The company of J. G. Graves with its introduction of a Foreign and Colonial Department certainly appeared to understand the need for an innovative approach. Furthermore, the administrative department certainly witnessed an investment in a managerial hierarchy. In 1902 a company advertisement noted the appointment of a manager, Mr. M. Griffin who sported the title, head of the Service and Foreign Office.³⁵ The following year, the department's managerial team appeared to have been expanded by the appointments of a Chief of Representatives and a Chief of Organisation.³⁶ Similar attention was also given to the firm's investment in marketing and distribution. In August 1903 an advertisement in the *Review of Reviews* encouraged colonial customers to request multiple copies of the firm's catalogues and announced the added incentives of cash discounts on shipping orders.³⁷ Complementing this incentive was the guarantee of a direct home delivery service, which the firm assured, was free of tariff restrictions and customs embargoes.³⁸ Furthermore, while Wilson's in-depth analysis of British business history suggests many firms remained reliant upon traditional methods of overseas sales involving the use of agents and acceptance houses, Graves' retailing programme provided a more personal service.³⁹ His investment in marketing through the

³² Chandler, *Scale and Scope*: p. 235.

³³ Chandler quoted in Wilson, *British Business History*, p. 6. See also A. D. Chandler, *Scale and Scope*; A. D. Chandler, 'Managerial enterprise and competitive capabilities,' *Business History*, 34:1, (1992), pp. 11-41.

³⁴ Wilson, *British Business History*, p. 92.

³⁵ 'On Special Service'.

³⁶ *Opportunities*, No. 6 (March, 1903), Box 1. 659.133 SSTF SL5L.

³⁷ *Review of Reviews* (August, 1903).

³⁸ *Opportunities*, No. 15, (circa 1905) Box 1. 659.133 SSTF, SL5L.

³⁹ Wilson, *British Business History*, p. 91.

circulation of the catalogues, along with a home delivery service, did not need to rely upon those older methods. While Wilson acknowledges the progressive move to direct sales by companies such as Horrocks and Wedgwood, mail order firms such as J. G. Graves has not be recognised.⁴⁰ Wilson also argues that only the major British firms who held ‘a dominant position in the domestic market possessed the resources [to adopt] [new business] strategies’.⁴¹ Similarly, Porter argues that adopting a ‘market[ing] distinctiveness’ was vital if British firms intended to compete and succeed.⁴² Accomplishing such distinctiveness, ‘proved [to be] extremely difficult’ within the confines of a traditional business climate still operating during the late Victorian and early Edwardian periods.⁴³ However the firm of J. G. Graves, with its business of manufacturing, multiple sales, and advertising initiatives did appear to attain this marketing distinctiveness. The early establishment of the firm’s Foreign and Colonial Department suggests the company was a significant forerunner within this area of mail order activity and was a clear demonstration of Graves’ entrepreneurial skills. For economist Joseph Schumpeter, the qualities of an innovative entrepreneur demanded the agility and ability to recognise and grasp new opportunities and secure ‘new outlets for [their] products’.⁴⁴ It appears that Graves possessed these Schumpeterian qualities.

Imperial Persuasion: The Opportunities of Advertising

When an opportunity arose in which the firm could connect with messages of empire then it did so. In addition to the plethora of catalogues regularly generated and dispatched by the firm, other advertising literature maintaining the firm’s imperial connection also made appearances. Designed to showcase the firm’s growth and success, *Let’s talk of Graves* was a souvenir booklet printed in the early 1900s to celebrate its achievements.⁴⁵ Numbering twenty-nine pages, it was a significant and lengthy piece of advertising literature that set out to detail the firm’s history, its business model and the size of its operations. Through artist's impressions and a detailed written narrative, the souvenir took its readers on a tour of the firm’s vast and varied departments and wherever possible, that narrative reinforced the

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁴² Michael E. Porter quoted in Wilson, *British Business History*, p. 90.

⁴³ *Ibid.* See also Michael E. Porter, *The Competitive Advantage of Nations* (New York, 1990).

⁴⁴ Joseph. A. Schumpeter quoted in Wilson, *British Business History*, p. 18. See also: Joseph S. Schumpeter, *The Theory of Economic Development: An Inquiry into Profits, Capital and Credit* (Harvard, 1934), p. 132.

⁴⁵ ‘Let’s Talk of Graves’ (circa 1902), Local Papers vol. 261, SLSL.

firm's support for Britain's empire. Its administration and clerical departments, the firm boasted, necessitated 'geographical' organis[ation]' as the company 'constitut[ed] a larger volume of postal business than is handled by any firm in the British Empire'.⁴⁶ For those readers who may have missed this message, it was repeated on the following page where the company's advertising department spelt out its confidence at being 'numbered amongst [one of] the largest advertisers [across] the British Empire'.⁴⁷ Whilst this was a boast that remains unproven, the repeated statements were not only designed to enhance the company's profile, but also reinforce a consciousness of empire amongst the company's customers, be them at home or abroad. In addition, the narrative also sent out the strong message that trading with Britain's empire was not just the reserve of large conglomerate firms with mass orders, but also involved firms serving the needs and wants of individual customers, including small singular transactions. For Graves, connecting with empire was an inclusive rather than an exclusive activity and reinforcing that message remained high on the firm's marketing agenda. Furthermore the company's global activities served to augment Sheffield's imperial connectedness, giving it an added dimension in relation to trade and the Empire.

Let's Talk of Graves, was an informative and enlightening piece of literature and its insightful design added credence to the firm's global programme as its imperial connection was continually reinforced and reiterated whenever an opportunity arose. Its publication also came at an interesting time in relation to empire and Britain's labour market. Issues of tariff reform were not just stimulating conversation about trade agreements but were also used to argue for the benefit of new employment opportunities. Joseph Chamberlain, the then Secretary of State for the Colonies and known to extol the virtues of imperial preference, produced one of his most popular tariff reform slogans, 'Tariff reform means work for all'.⁴⁸ Chamberlain's slogan fell neatly in line with supporters of the protectionist campaign, including those from the colonies. Richard Seddon, New Zealand's Prime Minister along with Australia's Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, both professed their interest in protective tariffs. When speaking at the Colonial Premiers Meeting in London in 1897,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Sydney, H. Zebel, 'Joseph Chamberlain and the Genesis of Tariff Reform', *Journal of British Studies*, 7 (1) (November, 1967), pp. 131-157.

Seddon had 'promised for New Zealand a customs rebate on British goods carried in British ships'.⁴⁹ Similarly, Barton, speaking in 1902, reiterated his 'favour[ing] of attempts to foster trade between the different parts of the Empire'.⁵⁰ If tariff reform could secure both a continuous flow of British goods on British ships and simultaneously augment employment opportunities at home, firms such as J. G. Graves with its plethora of diverse occupations would have been a driving force of some significance. Yet despite the ongoing political debacles and a government still dragging its heels over the issue, the rapid growth and development of Graves' company suggests that businessmen such as him already had a firm grasp upon the opportunities afforded by imperial trade. Graves' firm, with its dedicated workforce numbering thousands and the innovative development of its foreign and colonial department suggests that he would neither be hindered by politics nor be confined to domestic sales. Rather this confident businessman would seek and adopt any initiative needed to profit his company, and profit the empire.⁵¹

Imperial Persuasion: Service to the Colonies

Whether advertising the company's practices or its commodities, references to empire would often enter into the firm's narrative. Suggesting the catalogues were 'eagerly welcomed in all British colonies' was a statement designed to highlight the firm's penetration of the imperial market.⁵² When that narrative became embroidered with emotive language, it served to reinforce the importance of empire and an imperial ideology to an audience of consumers. In 1902 the company boasted that 'wherever the British flag floats proudly in the breeze, there the name and fame of J. G. Graves has penetrated'.⁵³ The statements were not only designed to augment the company's profile, but also to endorse the concepts and practices associated with imperial prowess, territorial acquisition and metropolitan pride. Essentially they acted as a surrogate form of imperial ambassador. Such practices were prevalent amongst advertisers of the period as they 'set out not only to illustrate a romantic view of imperial origins' but also reinforce a 'pride' in Britain's 'national

⁴⁹ Comments reported in *The Times*, March 12, 1902.

⁵⁰ *Daily Mail*, February 3, 1902.

⁵¹ Graves' personal views on the issue of tariff reform are unknown.

⁵² *Review of Reviews*, (November, 1903), p. 541.

⁵³ 'On Special Service'.

possessions'.⁵⁴ It was these national possessions, often referred to by Joseph Chamberlain as 'imperial estates,' that could prove to be a lucrative consumer outlet for retailers such as J. G. Graves.⁵⁵

The development of these estates (essentially communities of British citizens working and living abroad on behalf of the empire) was encouraged by a proliferation of politically engineered recruitment programmes. Promoted through a series of comments and advertisements requesting women colonists, the development of the South African Expansion Committee (an adjunct of the British Women's Emigration Association) was noted in 1902 to have the 'cordial approval' of Chamberlain.⁵⁶ Encouraging women to exercise their patriotic duty, whether as 'wife or maid', the article went on to suggest that their presence abroad would ensure that the colonies became 'not merely English in name [but would reflect] the homes of English men and English women'.⁵⁷ Indeed thirty years earlier in 1869, Carton Booth, commenting about life in Victoria, Australia, had suggested that 'the laws under which these far-off Britons live, the customs they observe, the houses they build [and] the towns they inhabit, ... all possess a strong family likeness to the same things at home'.⁵⁸ The further growth of these homes, encouraged through new migratory programmes, employment opportunities and those seeking missionary work or merely looking for new adventures became, as Porter observes, even more 'conspicuously occupied by the British'.⁵⁹ With Graves' programme of mail order and its variety of commodities, the firm was able to identify the needs of these overseas customers, supply them and bring a reassurance that the firm was a reliable and respectable enterprise. Guaranteeing to provide its overseas customers with the same efficient level of service as those at home, the firm suggested that distance did not present an obstacle for the firm and neither should it be seen as a hindrance for consumers. Graves, the firm stipulated, could deliver in 'perfect safety to the remotest corners of the empire'.⁶⁰ Whether residing in 'the west coast of Africa, sunny Egypt or chilly Canada', the company reinforced its commitment to serve the

⁵⁴ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 16.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ 'The Need of Women Colonists in South Africa', *Britannicus Civis, Saturday Review of Politics, Literature and Art*, 94: 2447 (September 20, 1902), p. 365.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ E. Carton Booth, *Another England: Life, Living, Homes and Homemakers in Victoria* (London, 1869), p. 1.

⁵⁹ Porter, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, p. 20.

⁶⁰ 'Let's Talk of Graves', p. 23.

needs of its overseas customers and reassured them that they would be made to 'feel that they are dealing with friends'.⁶¹ While these warm reassuring undertones were designed to elicit sales and cement a consumer/retailer relationship, they also reflected the vastness of Britain's empire, reinforced its continuance and conveyed the message that practices of patriotic consumption included both domestic and foreign orders. Empire was intrinsically tied to programmes of consumption be it through large import and export programmes or small transactions associated with supplying the comforts of home. For British consumers living overseas and seeking the familiar, the comfortable and the recognisable, Graves had the solution. While the tea may have come from Ceylon, the cotton from India and the sugar from South America, the china tea cup, teapot, sugar bowl, dresses, suits, curtains and carpets were all eagerly awaiting their shipment overseas from the Sheffield firm of J. G. Graves.

The company was primed to serve the needs of these imperial communities and the use of friendly advertising rhetoric combined with caveats and warnings about foreign retailers was a clear demonstration of the firm's advertising prowess. Eager to augment sales and reinforce the firm's trading programme, it honed in on the perceived fears associated with foreign retailers. Embedded within a contrasting narrative, the firm suggested that whilst its domestic customers enjoyed security and abundance, life in the colonies could be fraught, challenging and unpredictable:

In speaking of our foreign and colonial trade we feel that we are making a pertinent observation when we say that if the satisfactory state of mind indicated is enjoyed by many thousands of the firm's customers who have the privilege of living within the peaceful confines of the British Isles, how much more must the firm's straightforward method of business be appreciated by those British subjects resident in far off Canada, Australia or Africa where the individual can make but meagre safeguards against imposition and deception.⁶²

⁶¹ *Opportunities*, No. 15 (circa 1905).

⁶² *Ibid.*

While clearly designed to elicit sales and promote the growth of patriotic consumption, this use of jingoistic marketing rhetoric highlighted the complex relationship between empire and matters of consumption. Graves' warnings embraced and embroidered a menu of concerns and caveats and highlighted the attempts retailers would go to in their efforts to attract and engage with customers. Identifying the consumers as homogenously British, exploiting fears associated with foreign transactions and contextualising and contrasting the experiences of consumers at home and abroad was a direct and deliberate marketing ploy. While those living in the metropolis enjoyed the 'peaceful confines' of the domestic front, the lives of consumers residing in the colonies and dominions (the firm of Graves implied) were fraught and troubled. For the British consumer at home, transactions remained simple and straightforward; for the British consumer abroad 'imposition' and 'deception' presented as a daily dilemma. While honesty, integrity and trustworthiness were the remit of British traders, corruption, deceit and dishonesty appeared to be the remit of the foreign trader. Mackenzie, acknowledging the intense relationship between empire and the production of marketing literature, notes that 'specific companies developed distinctive styles [and] set out to associate their products with an imperial enterprise which not only had a high newsworthy profile, but [one] also perceived to be acceptable... to their consumers'.⁶³ It appears that this Sheffield firm had more than grasped this premise of newsworthiness. Associating products with empire may have fulfilled one agenda, but associating the company and its business operations through spurious comparisons with foreign competitors provided an alternative newsworthiness. The circumspection alluded to by the firm and implied through the use of conjecture was a clear attempt to discredit the retailing programmes of foreign traders. For Ramamurthy, advertising 'provides a context [that] is economic and political as well as cultural' and Mackenzie argues that 'advertisements with a racial content can be placed firmly at the intersection of capitalism and culture'.⁶⁴ The firm's attempts to connect business with empire did not just involve the promotion of the commodity but also the promotion of the company. Two areas it attempted to achieve this were firstly to recognise the needs of British consumers abroad, including their sentimental attachment to commodities and home comforts, and secondly, to associate the supply of those needs with warnings of foreign shady cash transactions, spurious traders and dubious

⁶³ Mackenzie in Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders*, p. xiii.

⁶⁴ Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders*, p. 2; Mackenzie cited in Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders*, p. xiii.

retailers. Whether real or not, the dichotomies and dilemmas facing the British consumer abroad attracted a comprehensive narrative, one that sought to exaggerate those dilemmas in an attempt to secure the firm's profits and encourage practices of patriotic consumption.

Imperial Persuasion: Patriotism and Politics

While engaging with customers across the colonies and dominions provided the firm with the possibility of a lucrative sales programme, a second opportunity to marry its operations with empire added to those prospects. Through an engineered and forceful marrying of rhetoric, Graves sought to add prestige to the company by highlighting the firm's intention to supply the needs of the British armed forces serving abroad. While this association with empire was economically targeted, it also became heavily politicised. An article in 1902 'On Special Service: How we Supply His Majesty's Forces' relayed a stream of imperialistically aligned narratives which were firmly welded to an ideologically constructed concept of the British identity.⁶⁵

Indeed, the name of J. G. Graves is almost as well known in the Service as Bobs or Kitchener. You cannot bluff Tommy Atkins. It is not to be wondered at therefore, that every regiment in the British Army and every ship in the Royal Navy, contributes its quota to the hundreds of thousands of customers on the firm's books. Thousands of our country's noble defenders are the proud possessors of one or other of our leading lines.⁶⁶

These 'noble defenders' and 'stalwarts' were a direct reference to the troops fighting in the conflict of the second Boer war, who according to the firm had been supplied with up to 2,000 of its Express pocket watches.⁶⁷ The use of such terms and language was not just an attempt to increase sales and popularise the commodity, it was also about associating the commodity with the empire and the name of Graves with its defenders. Such narrative not only amplified the meaning of empire but interwove its complexity into practices of consumption by marrying marketing rhetoric to a recent and emotive event. For Mackenzie, such 'overtly propagandist' practices not only enveloped advertising practices of the period

⁶⁵ 'On Special Service'.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

but took particular hold when advertisers discovered that 'imperial patriotism proved to be [so] profitable'.⁶⁸ For the firm of Graves, that imperial patriotism was all encompassing and for its audience of consumers certainly not socially divided. Recognising that sales depended upon attracting a wide social audience, the heraldic character of both the higher rank of Kitchener and lower rank of Tommy Atkins remained mutually inclusive. Indeed all ranks of the armed forces needed the service of firms such as J. G. Graves. Flagging the name of Graves alongside these 'noble defenders' and the names of 'Kitchener and Tommy Atkins' both sanctified the firm's position on empire and morally advocated the actions of those attempting to preserve it.

Graves and his firm appeared to relish any opportunity to engage with matters of empire, including those inspired by business and those warranting a political reaction. In 1903 an article published by the firm both openly reinforced the support for Britain's troops and loudly condemned and criticised the government for what was perceived to be serious failings during the Boer conflict.

We pay millions of pounds every year for the upkeep of our military organisations and yet when the war broke out in South Africa, the War Office could not be relied upon to furnish our officers with a correct and up-to-date map of the district in which our troops were required to operate; this inefficiency was the cause of many of the regrettable incidents which occurred during that long and costly struggle. Plenty of pipe-clay and plenty of red-tape but when a map was wanted which could be depended upon to guide our troops through South Africa, it was a larger order than our aristocratic War Office could supply and our brave soldiers paid the penalty in loss of liberty and life.⁶⁹

Such condemnation of the British government was vociferous and to the point and clearly intended to reach the firm's audience of customers. Interestingly the firm's mail shot

⁶⁸ Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 3.

⁶⁹ *Opportunities*, No. 6, 1903, pp. 18-19. Box 1. 659.133 SSTF SLSL. It is unknown whether Graves wrote this article himself but the firm certainly used the opportunity to echo these opinions through its marketing literature.

comments aligned with other more in-depth reports of the conflict, including those of Edgar Sanderson. Sanderson, a cleric, schoolteacher and prolific writer of the late nineteenth century similarly accused the government of serious failings during the conflict. Suggesting that government failings contributed to the unfortunate outcome of the war, 'our forces', he argued, were by no means 'amply supplied,' were 'deficient in light cavalry' and 'were unsupported by the swiftly moving guns of the Royal Horse Artillery'.⁷⁰ While Sanderson's examination was more detailed, both narratives shared the firm opinion that the government had acted negligently and recklessly. Furthermore, the public had to be informed. For Sanderson's readers, 'the disasters experienced by the brave who went forth to uphold the honour of the British flag in South Africa' was heraldically compensated by the 'brave little band of Britons [who] kept up a return-fire inflict[ing] serious loss on the enemy'.⁷¹ For Graves' customers it was the brave soldiers who had 'paid the penalty in loss of liberty and life'. While both reports clearly rang out with the complexities of empire, the firm's literature, designed to promote the consumption of tangible commodities, simultaneously demonstrated its ability to promote the consumption of the intangible. In essence, the compelling intricacies of empire wove their way into the commodity, the catalogue, the company and the consumer. The war was not Britain's finest hour and contemporary commentators, whether professional writers or mail shot opportunists such as the firm of J. G. Graves were quick to point this out through their own medium of communication. Clearly the evidence from this firm demonstrated that narratives of empire could invade and pervade the public's consciousness even through the literature of commerce.

Associating commodities, retailing and advertising with ideological meanings and messages was nothing new, but changes in methods of communication, including the popularisation of mail order, provided an added feature to such practices. Contemporary observers of the period such as J. A. Hobson argued that new methods of communication held a great deal of responsibility for the dissemination of knowledge and the flaming of passions. In 1901, Hobson's publication, *The Psychology of Jingoism*, suggested that the 'mechanical facilities

⁷⁰ Edgar Sanderson, *The British Empire at Home and Abroad: An Account of its Origin, Progress and Present Position with Full Descriptions of Canada, Australia, South Africa, India and Other Colonies and Dependencies*. Vol. 4 (London, 1903), pp. 322-323.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

for cheap quick carriage of persons, goods and news signif[ied] that each average man or woman of today [was] habitually susceptible to the direct influence of a thousand times [as] were their ancestors before the age of steam and electricity'.⁷² For Hobson, this 'mechanical rigidity of print possess[ed] a degree of credit, which when - repeated with sufficient frequency becomes well-nigh absolute'.⁷³ Hobson's argument lay in the belief that the printed word, when continually repeated and reinforced, had the power to influence, manipulate and persuade. Furthermore, that influence increased when the narrative 'appeal[ed] to [popular] passions and statements'.⁷⁴ The firm's short but piercing article certainly identified with a national and emotive event and the repetitive use of 'our' and 'we' ensured it appealed and applied to a national sentiment and a national audience. J. G. Graves' perseverance in business had provided a platform upon which views and opinions could be aired and shared with a consuming public. Furthermore, this secondary use of the mail order catalogues (as a medium to transmit knowledge and information) promoted much more than simply the consumption of tangible commodities. Whether complimenting, criticising, commending or condemning, at times the firm's running commentary on matters of empire resembled a series of passionate mission statements.

Whenever an opportunity arose to connect the business with messages of empire, then the firm grasped it. When Rosebery in 1903 heralded the firm as a shining example of new modern business methods, Graves' again moulded his response to an imperial narrative.⁷⁵ 'We believe', stated Graves, 'the people of this great empire - will insist on having capable men at the helm, men who may be depended upon to steer their department safely through any storm or danger which may be met with on the sea of International politics'.⁷⁶ Indeed, continued Graves 'We pride ourselves on being a great and wealthy nation... [and it is] our intention to maintain front rank honours among the nations of the world'.⁷⁷ Recognising his status in the world of business and acknowledging his grasp of a ready-made audience, Graves appeared to accept that the use of marketing literature to make such proclamations and public statements was both an acceptable and responsible practice. However for

⁷² John Atkinson Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism* (London, 1901), p. 6.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷⁵ *Review of Reviews* (November, 1903).

⁷⁶ *Opportunities*, No. 6, (1903) p. 17.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Hobson, asserting such power was worrying: 'How great a power is here placed', he argued, 'in the control of a commercial clique or a political party, or anybody of rich, able and energetic men desirous to impose a general belief and a general policy upon the mass of the people'.⁷⁸ While for Hobson these practices could be seen as an infliction upon the public, for businesses and businessmen such as Graves, issuing such proclamations was both a duty and a signal of imperial commitment.

Imperial Persuasion: The grandeur and minutiae of consumption

While imperial allegiances were conferred through such articles, the firm also cemented its imperial connectedness through its sale of commodities and those sales included both the grandeur and minutiae of consumption. Hall and Rose suggest that from the late eighteenth century and onwards, 'Empire's influence on the metropole was uneven'.⁷⁹ At times, the authors suggest, 'it was simply there [yet] not a subject of popular critical consciousness', at other times 'it was highly visible' and whilst 'the majority of Britons most of the time were probably neither gung-ho nor avid anti-imperialists - the everyday lives of Britons were infused with an imperial presence'.⁸⁰ Commodities, either through their design, their indigenous production or their accompanying advertising rhetoric, either blended into this infusion or blatantly sustained an imperial connection through the language of advertising. The import of colonially produced or indigenously grown products such as spices, fruits, tea, sugar and cocoa had witnessed the introduction of assimilated items that had begun to adorn the homes of British consumers from the eighteenth century. Tea kettles, tea caddies, sugar tongs and spice racks had all become much sought after items as had oriental rugs, exotically printed fabrics, jewellery, fashions and ornaments complete with Asian detailing, motifs, shapes and trimmings. While fresh produce was not sold by the firm of J. G. Graves, the business did share in the spoils of empire through the sale of these colonially entangled goods, an example of which revolved around the consumption of tea. Tea, as a favoured British beverage, had been growing in popularity since the eighteenth century and its consumption had stimulated a market growth in tea drinking accoutrements.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism*, p. 10.

⁷⁹ Hall and Rose, *At Home with the Empire*, p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ For further reading on the subject of Britain's history and the consumption of tea see: James Walvin, *Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800* (London, 1997), pp. 9-31; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging*

These associated products included tea kettles, tea caddies and cabinets, sugar tongs, cream jugs, slop dishes and fine china ware. Not only were such items of practical use but their designs often incorporated colonially interrelated features based upon Asian and tropical themes. However while tea kettles complete with decorative stands, exotic detailing and crafted ornateness, echoed their colonial entanglements, their ownership had often been the reserve of the middle classes whose displays of sophistication, refinement and elegance included the objectification of the tea table (figure 37).⁸²

As De Groot argues 'signalling respectability and social hierarchy around the tea table' or desiring goods by 'association with patriotism [was] integral to the whole process of consumption with its global and colonial dimensions'.⁸³

Mail order firms such as J. G. Graves appeared keen to add these patriotic and colonially infused products to their range of wares and table kettles, cream jugs and fine pottery all featured in several of the firm's catalogues. This was clearly a recognition that while the beverage was widely consumed amongst the working and lower middle classes, its sophisticated accoutrements had often remained out of their reach.⁸⁴ For customers of J. G. Graves, obtaining these interrelated imperial products (complete with their signals of sophistication and elegance) became a more realistic prospect. Paying for the kettles over a period of weeks without having to resort to credit checks or added interest allowed these consumers to emulate and aspire while simultaneously adorn their own homes with these meanings of empire. In similar fashion to

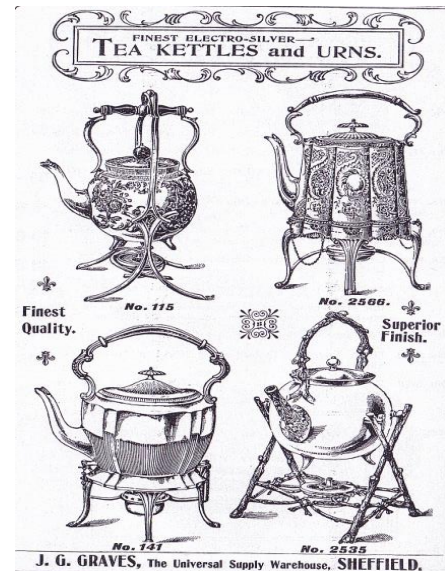


Figure 37. Kettles sold by J. G. Graves (circa, 1902) Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. Box 1, 659.133SSTF.

the Nation, 1707-1837 (London, 1996), p. 75; Maxine Berg & Helen Clifford; *Consumers and Luxury: Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 70-74; Hoh-Cheung & Lorna H. Mui. 'The Commutation Act and the Tea Trade in Britain, 1784-1793', *The Economic History Review*, 16:2 (1963), pp. 234-253; Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Oxford, 2000), p. 115; Peter M. Stearns, *Consumerism in World History: The Global Transformation of Desire* (London 2001), p. 42; Erica Rappaport, 'Packaging China: Foreign Articles and Dangerous Tastes in the Mid-Victorian Tea Party' in Frank Trentmann (ed.), *The Making of the Consumer*, pp. 125-146.

⁸² Kettles sold by J. G. Graves (circa, 1902), Box 1. 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

⁸³ Joanna De Groot, 'Metropolitan Desires and Colonial Connections', p. 169.

⁸⁴ Walvin notes that tea drinking had been growing in popularity amongst the working classes since the 1780s. Walvin, *Fruits of the Empire*, p. 15.

Graves, the mail order firm of Kay's also recognised this allegiance between commodity, its imperial interconnectedness and its appeal to a wider audience of consumers. Kay's sales of interrelated products during the 1890s included table ornaments bearing patterns of palm trees, goblets with depictions of tropical fruits and African mantle clocks with designs resembling the shape of temples (figure 38).⁸⁵

These products all brought the empire and its meanings closer to home and not just through their adorning features or their practical use. While Davidoff and Hall note that homes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were 'as much [about] social construct and state of mind as [they were about the] reality of bricks and mortar', Ryan's analysis of the *Daily Mail* Ideal Home exhibitions in the early twentieth century argues that the home, was not only a 'site of dutiful

consumption' but was 'at the heart of the British Empire'.⁸⁶ The home, it appears, both maintained itself as a centre of social construct and as a site of dutiful

consumption with imperial meanings. Augmenting and profiting from these consumer practices lay the efforts of retailers, including the enterprising initiatives of British mail order. Not only was Graves selling a plethora of products imbued with symbolic attachments of empire, but the firm was augmenting their availability to a much wider audience of consumers. However, despite employing such marketing initiatives and actively pursuing efforts to bring the empire to the hearth and home of domestic consumers, mail order's engagement with these programmes have been largely omitted from wider historical analysis. Yet any analysis involving the interconnected activity between commodities, consumption, the empire and the home cannot be fully explored or explained without reference to the efforts of firms such as J. G. Graves. Indeed it did not just involve

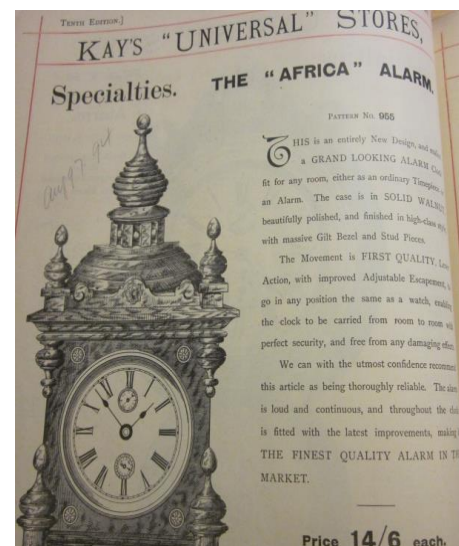


Figure 38. 'The Africa Alarm Clock sold by Kay & Company catalogue, (circa, 1890). Images courtesy of University of Worcester Research Collections and the Kays Heritage Group.

⁸⁵ Kay and Company Catalogue (circa, 1890), Kay and Company Archives, University of Worcester.

⁸⁶ Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 358; Ryan, 'The Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition, 1908-39' in Andrews & Talbot, *All the World and Her Husband*, pp. 11-12.

the sale of imperially related products but also engaged with a menu of imperially laden narratives.

Connoting an imperial ideology through the titling and labelling of products amplified this programme of consumer infusion. Attaching recognisable imperial nuances to a range of items was a common practice engaged in by both manufacturers and retailers and many of the products sold by the firm of Graves continued to signal this imperial link. While objects from fine china tea sets to accordions bore the titles of *Empress*, canteens of cutlery and semi-porcelain vases carried the name of *Empire*.⁸⁷ Similarly, while gramophones were given the names, *Victory* and *Chieftain*, bicycles came attached with such titles as *Imperial* and *Colonial*.⁸⁸ Even fashions engaged in this conveyance of meaning. The ladies *Empire Outfit*, a stylish well-tailored suit sporting a militaristic style double breasted jacket conveyed confidence, civility and respectability.⁸⁹ It was also a suit designed to reflect the public rather than the private role of the domesticated woman and this added to those imperially associated concepts of status and authority. However this conveyance of meaning was not the reserve of sophisticated fashions. Practical worker's clothes, sporting outfits and everyday wear also witnessed an attachment to imperial nuances. Coats for maids carried the title *Imperial*, women's overalls and pinafores bore the label *Empire*, and in the 1930s-40s, Graves' sale of overcoats and shoes carried more overt references to empire through such labels as *Gambia* and *Sahara*.⁹⁰

In similar vein, men's fashions also attracted an association with empire; however their labels, such as *Spartan* and *Defender* resonated with the concepts of dominance, resilience, supremacy and imperial fortitude (Figure 39).⁹¹ Another advertisement for men's footwear in 1929 clearly attempted to marry the product's



Figure 39. J. G. Graves Men's footwear (circa 1930s). Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. Box 2, 658.133SSTF.

⁸⁷ Empress China tea set: *Opportunities* (circa, 1910). Box 4. 659.133. SSTF; Empress Accordion: J. G. Graves, Receipts and Adverts: 1897-1898, 658.872 SSTQ; Empire Cutlery, *Opportunities* (1952), p. 157; Empire Vase, *Opportunities* (circa 1910). Box 4. 659.133SSTF. SLSL.

⁸⁸ Victory gramophone: *Opportunities* (Autumn, 1929), vol. 12, p. 4 and Chieftain Gramophone, *Opportunities* (Christmas, 1928), vol. 3. p. 42. Box 4, 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

⁸⁹ Ladies Empire Suit, *Opportunities* (circa 1930s). Box 2. 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

⁹⁰ *Empire Overall*: *Opportunities* (1944), p. 41, box 2; *Imperial Maid's Coat* (circa 1900), box 2; *Gambia coat*. (1929), vol. 3 p. 23, box 2; *Sahara promenade ladies shoes* (1930), box 2. vol. 7, p. 21. 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

⁹¹ J.G. Graves Catalogues (1929), vol. 8, p. 4. Box 2. 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

practical qualities with a militaristic and imperialistic narrative. Described as ‘thoroughly dependable’, the boot’s strength and durability was enhanced through their design which was apparently based upon a ‘South African field principle’.⁹² While this ‘South African field principle’ was not elaborated upon, it did not need to be; the association between commodity and empire was clearly there.

There was a relationship between commodity and the promotion of an imperial ideology and both retailers and advertisers employed a wide menu of remits and roles to associate the two. The marketing of men’s pocket watches left little doubt about the firm’s ability to interconnect the sale of commodities with empire. While the pocket watches featured in the firm’s catalogues bore such titles as *Colonial Hunter*, *Autocrat*, *Referee* and *Imperial* and carried leading and evocative narratives such as, ‘hunting watches for home and colonial service’, advertisements placed in newspapers were far more blatant in content.⁹³ For example, while an advertisement in the *North Devon Journal* suggested that Graves’ pocket watches were ‘worn throughout the empire’ the *Western Times* portrayed the watches being worn by police officers in India.⁹⁴ Similarly, the *Manchester Courier* and *The Cornishman’s Journal* suggested that explorers, adventurers and expeditioners in British Colombia were heavily reliant upon the accuracy of Graves’ time-pieces.⁹⁵ Even more blatant were the advertisements directly connecting the pocket watches with the events of the second Boer War. In 1900 *Reynold’s Newspaper* carried an advertisement headed up with the title ‘Buller’s Force’.⁹⁶ Claiming to contain a troop’s testimony of the conditions faced whilst stationed at Chieveley Camp, the advertisement married the fortitude of the troop with the sturdiness and reliability of the commodity. Having ‘bore the burning sun, the storms and the hardship of the campaign’ stated the testimony; the watch had managed to ‘prove itself’. Associating the durability of the watch may have been a narrative seeking to promote sales, but its relevance to the stamina, resilience and hazards endured by the troop in the protection of the empire was all too obvious.

⁹² J. G. Graves ‘Boot Book’ (1929). Box 2. 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

⁹³ Hunting watches for Home and Colonial Service (circa 1901) and other pocket watch advertisements are contained in a selection of J. G. Graves catalogues. Boxes 1-4. 659.133 SSTF, SLSL.

⁹⁴ *North Devon Journal* (February 7, 1901), p. 7; *The Western Times* (November, 22, 1903), p. 3.

⁹⁵ *Manchester Courier* (November 1, 1905), p. 3; *The Cornishman* (November, 15, 1905), p. 2.

⁹⁶ *Reynold’s Newspaper* (April 1, 1900), p. 6. The same advertisement had also appeared in 1899 in the firm’s catalogue *Opportunities*. Box 4. 659.133. SLSL.

Similar advertisements interconnecting and interweaving with emotive descriptions and depictions included the testimonies of a soldier whose service in Algoa Bay, South Africa in 1902 had seen him (and his pocket watch) 'immersed in water for nearly five hours rescuing drowning soldiers'.⁹⁷ However perhaps the most elevated of these advertisements appeared in *Lloyds Weekly* in 1900 (Figure 40).⁹⁸ Complete with a large image of Lord Roberts and the testimony of a troop serving under Roberts' command in the Military Mounted Police in Pretoria, the advertisement suggested the troop, Corporal G. D. Cawley and his pocket watch had 'stood one of the most trying tests it could possible under go'. While acknowledging the advertising latitude employed by retailers and the inability to verify such testimonies, the primary evidence emanating from Graves' extensive advertising programme clearly demonstrates the integral and intense relationship adopted by the firm to sell products imbricated with the meanings of empire.

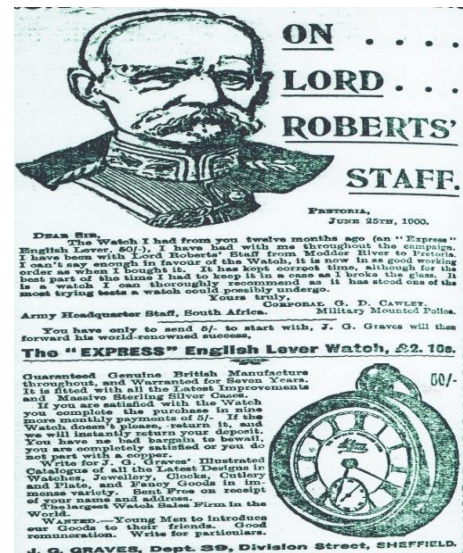


Figure 40. Advertisement for J. G. Graves Pocket Watch featured in *Lloyds Weekly* (September 16, 1900), Image courtesy of the British Library.

Thomas Richards suggests that 'the commodity looked like a dutiful civil servant of the Empire'.⁹⁹ That dutifulness did not just revolve around any emblematic representation of empire or even its source of production, it also included the myriad of imperial nuances attached to the commodities through the use of advertising language. This use of language sought to promote the continuance of an imperial ideology by projecting a national image of centrality and dominance onto commodities and ultimately onto practices of consumption. O'Barr, noting the ability of advertisers to convey and interrelate products with politicised and ideological allegiances suggests that the centrality of 'most [advertising] messages [revolve around] dominance and subordination; power and submission'.¹⁰⁰ These not only 'convey ideas that are political and system maintaining [but are also often] ideological in

⁹⁷ *Daily Mail* (December 8, 1905), p. 7; *Lancashire Daily Post* (December, 1905), page number obscured.

⁹⁸ *Lloyds Weekly* (September 16, 1900), p. 14.

⁹⁹ Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, p. 166.

¹⁰⁰ O'Barr, *Culture and the Advertisement*, p. 4.

nature'.¹⁰¹ The evidence from Graves suggests that such allegiances were actively present and vibrant. While O'Barr acknowledges that the consumer remains the ultimate author of interpretation, he also argues that 'a joint collaborative effort' of interpretation exists between retailer and consumer.¹⁰² Yet arguably, such joint collaborative efforts can be motivated by both the contemporary political ideologies and influenced by the choice of terminology and images chosen by advertisers seeking to promote their products. For Graves that choice of rhetoric and imagery acted as an imperial umbilical cord, firmly anchoring the firm's marketing activities to the country's empire and an imperial ideology. Whether the customer of Graves sought aspiration through their purchase of an exotically detailed and imperially interrelated product such as a tea pot or merely purchased a pair of practical work boots designed upon a 'South African field principle' was irrelevant. Either subversively or knowingly, customers of J. G. Graves were continually subjected to and infused with messages of empire as the firm sought to harmonise its sales literature with an imperialistically attuned and politicised sales programme. As Hinderaker suggests, 'empire [was] a cultural artefact [which] belong[ed] to a geography of the mind as well as a geography of power' and that geography involved both the grandeur and minutiae of consumption.¹⁰³

Imperial Persuasion: Consuming Identities

The interconnectedness between empire and consumption involved a diverse programme of activities, from the sale of colonial and colonially related goods to the structuring of advertising programmes. At the helm of these activities were the manufacturers, retailers and advertisers whose agendas were simply to attract customers and augment sales. However the marketing programmes also created and sustained a series of cultural meanings, many of which revolved around issues of difference and the promotion of constructed identities. Often elaborated, embroidered, embellished, or simply phantasmagorical in detail, these meanings not only invited practices of tangible consumption but also had an ability to 'organise knowledge, perception and understanding

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.2.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁰³ Eric. A. Hinderaker. 'The Four Indian Kings' and the Imaginative Construction of the British Empire," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd set: 53 (1996), p. 486.

of the world'.¹⁰⁴ Whilst grand travelling exhibitions brought empire closer to home through awe and spectacle, Britain's consumers were also treated to lavish and often ostentatious displays by department stores. From a didactic perspective, such displays were explicit in their representation, or to be more exact, their misrepresentation of the colonial *other's* identity, including their lifestyle and their culture. Described as 'magnificent stage sets,' Falk and Campbell have observed the extent to which department stores would go to encourage customers to visit and spend their money; 'dress shows and pageants - spectacular oriental extravaganzas, live tableaux of Turkish harems, Cairo markets or Hindu temples with live performers, dance, music and oriental products were [all] frequent events'.¹⁰⁵ These spectacles, designed to encourage consumption also, suggests Falk and Campbell, provided a 'popular knowledge about empire'.¹⁰⁶ Yet these commercialised offerings of knowledge were not the reserve of state sponsored exhibitions or the spectacles of large department stores, even 'the meanest of shops' had a role to play as they sold the 'produce of distant colonies'.¹⁰⁷

Mail order also played its role in the conveyance of such representations, some of which included the use of constructed imagery. In 1905, the firm of J. G. Graves used their article detailing the work of the company's Colonial and Foreign Department to present a romanticised image of Egyptian life.¹⁰⁸ Portraying a group of indigenous travellers riding camels and wearing traditional costumes adorned with keffiyeh headdresses, the image conjured up an exotic life in North East Africa. Complete with pyramids in the background and an artistic portrait of the desert sun, it evoked a mysticism and exoticism that was far removed from the realities of most Egyptian lifestyles. Indeed the bloody legacy which had led to Britain's occupation of Egypt in 1882 was obscured by an evocative portrayal of a serene, tranquil and passive Egyptian society.¹⁰⁹ It was an image embedded with meanings that sought to echo the evocative, the exotic and the mysterious.

¹⁰⁴ De Groot 'Metropolitan Desires and Colonial Connections', p. 188.

¹⁰⁵ Falk & Campbell, *The Shopping Experience*, p. 67.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Walvin, *Fruits of Empire*, p. 161.

¹⁰⁸ *Opportunities*, No. 15, (circa 1905) Box 1. 659.133SSTF, SLSL.

¹⁰⁹ For the history of Britain's occupation of Egypt, see: Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid-Marsot, 'The British occupation of Egypt from 1882', in Porter, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, pp. 651-664.

Eighteen years later, in 1923, the mail order firm of Kay's & Company also honed in on images of Egypt (Figure 41). With full page portrayals of Arabian alleyways, souks and Egyptian street traders, the image conjured up another romanticised portrayal of Egyptian life. Yet neither of the images used by the two firms was specifically linked to the sale of individual commodities. While Graves used the image as a header for the firm's article about its colonial department, Kay's was simply placed in the catalogues as additional reading matter. Unlike the department stores who invested in imperial displays and representations to draw in an audience and augment sales, mail order did not need to do this. Yet projecting these constructed images of empire clearly mattered to these mail order companies.

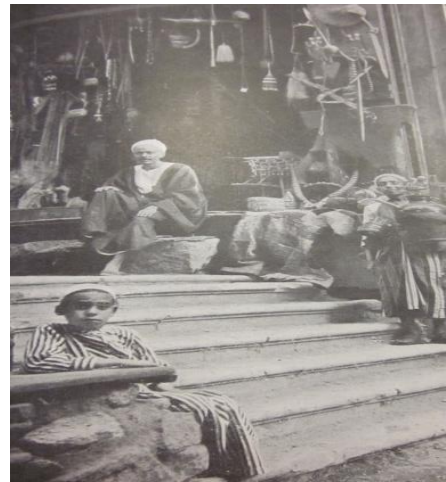


Figure 41. Image of Egyptian souk in Kay's catalogue. Courtesy of University of Worcester Research Collections and the Kays Heritage Group.

Matters of empire held a deep and rich value to the retailers and the inclusion of romanticised and sanitised portrayals of the colonies and dominions gave the catalogues an added attraction. Essentially the use of such images acted as a literary conduit, reinforcing the companies' connection to empire, acting as a vehicle to transmit knowledge and engaging the customer's attention. The message was clearly there; empire mattered and so did its representation. Edward Said has argued that 'representations are embedded first in language and then in the culture, institutions and political ambience of the representer'.¹¹⁰ As representors, Graves and Kays saw their marketing material as a ready platform upon which to depict and promote images of the colonies and the colonial other and providing those images complied with contemporary ideological, social and cultural constructs, then they performed their roles. They disseminated knowledge, be that real or imagined, alluded to the company's imperial allegiance and encouraged consumers to peruse the catalogues and importantly, continue to consume.

Interconnecting the medium of advertising with a global world was of course nothing new. In the 1700s, retailers attempting to sell their commodities through the circulation of journals, newspapers and pamphlets, suggests historian Elizabeth Perkins, gave consumers

¹¹⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), p.272. See also: Roger Joseph, 'Orientalism by Edward Said,' *American Anthropologist*, 82 (4), December, 1980, p. 948.

‘an exciting glimpse of the outside world’.¹¹¹ These exciting glimpses were not just connected to tangible exotic produce or foreign eclectic designs but included a gamut of supplementary messages that accompanied the marketing rhetoric of retailers. Similar to the journals of the 1700s, Graves and Kay’s portrayal of foreign lands (in this example, Egypt) was permeated by mystical souks, smoky Arabian alleyways and shady market traders. In essence these mail order firms followed the same marketing practices as their retailing predecessors. They not only understood that their success relied upon the effective advertising of products but also their marketing material had to remain popular and current. In essence, the catalogues had to entice and be enticing and this could be achieved if they nodded to and fitted in with contemporary ideologies. Marrying the meaning of empire to the exotic, the mysterious, the different and the mystical was both popular and productive. While Falk and Campbell suggest the department stores played a creative role in the display of ‘exoticized yet commercial representations of oriental imagery’ and their ‘narratives [performed] a major source of popular knowledge’ including that of ‘empire, other cultures and aesthetic formations,’ so too did mail order.¹¹² Whilst the stores utilised their floor space to construct spectacular oriental extravaganzas, the mail order companies honed their advertising space to communicate the same conceptual meanings through pictures, constructed imagery and a degree of literary license.¹¹³ These romanticised, idealised and sanitised portrayals of empire were not just the remit of large exhibitions, department stores or even Walvin’s ‘meanest of shops’ but also mail order enterprises.

Consumption and the Imperial Citizens of the Future

Advertising did not just portray romanticised or indeed even sanitised images of the colonies or the colonial ‘other’. Neither was such representations reserved for the commodity or the adult consumer. Goods aimed at children were also connected to the meanings and messages of Empire and they had the ability to represent identities on the basis of a belief in racial difference. Whether through their construction, detailing, use or advertising rhetoric, toys, books, games and play outfits had the capacity to contribute to a menu of racial thoughts, feelings, judgements and impressions. Selling children’s toys was

¹¹¹ Elizabeth A. Perkins, ‘The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky’, *Journal of America History*, 78:2, (September, 1991), p. 503.

¹¹² Falk & Campbell, *The Shopping Experience*, p. 67.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

part of Graves' retailing programme and an advertisement for dolls (circa late 1930s) highlights how the commodity held the capacity to connote racial messages (figure 42).¹¹⁴

While the white dolls are fashionably dressed in attractive outfits, pretty bonnets, party outfits and veils, the black doll's outfit is a simple candy striped dress and apron. Represented as the maid, the cleaner or the cook, the black doll's identity was firmly cemented by its clothing, and it was an identity anchored to the role of domestic servitude. The placing of racial difference in the dressing of the dolls was stark and absolute. Race meant difference and difference equated to two concepts, authority or servitude. As De Groot



Figure 42, Christmas edition of Graves' catalogue (circa 1930s) Courtesy Sheffield Local Studies Library.

argues, toys were one such commodity that 'positioned white British people as powerful, responsible [and] regulating in relation to [their] black colonial subjects'.¹¹⁵ Expanding on this, Ramamurthy argues that for advertising (or products) 'to show the black child working was not seen as a symbol of exploitation, since they 'appeared' to be in their 'natural place'.¹¹⁶ Clearly both the arguments of De Groot and Ramamurthy are evidenced in this example of Graves' marketing literature.

While the dolls and their fashions adhered to these constructed identities and roles, other toys, through their design, descriptions and advertising language were far more explicit in their racial overtones.

Ten Little Niggers, (figure 43), constructed on the design of black figures was a game of skittles where children were encouraged to knock the 'Nigger boys' over. Dolls,

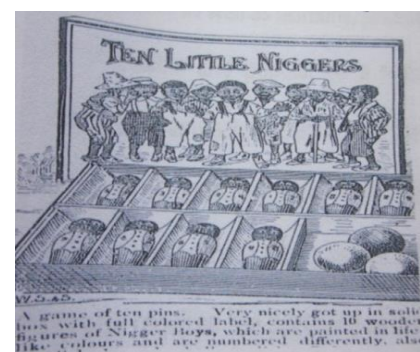


Figure 43 J. G. Graves Catalogue (circa 1930s). Courtesy Sheffield Local Studies Library. Box 4 659.133SSTF.

Laughing Black Sambo and Sambo's Little Sister (figure 44) were dressed in stereotypical outfits, complete with 'black silky wigs' and adorned with colourful 'beaded necklaces'

and 'Nigger' money boxes affixed with images of monkey's heads were portrayed alongside joker's toys such as a Whistling Nigger which came with moving eyes and a tongue that shot

¹¹⁴ Christmas edition of Graves' catalogue, (circa 1930s): 659.133SSTF (Box 5). SLSL.

¹¹⁵ De Groot. 'Metropolitan Desires and Colonial Connections', p. 189.

¹¹⁶ Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders*, p. 19.



Figure 44 J. G. Graves Catalogue (circa 1930s). Courtesy Sheffield Local Studies Library. Box 4 659.133SSTF.

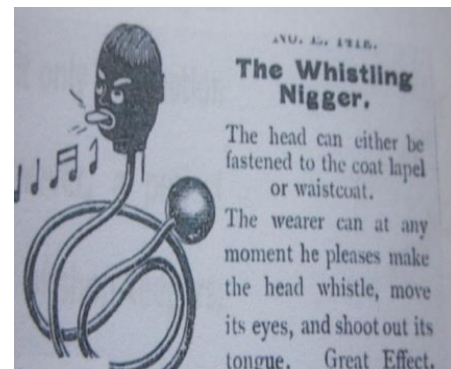


Figure 45 J. G. Graves Catalogue (circa 1930s). Courtesy Sheffield Local Studies Library. Box 4 659.133SSTF.

irreverently from its mouth (figure 45).¹¹⁷ These toys with their racial inferences, solicited to conjure up concepts of the wild, subservient, uncivilised savage were not new to advertising or products. As Ramamurthy's detailed analysis on soap and advertising suggests, 'advertisers could find no better way to exaggerate the cleaning potential for their product than by depicting a black person – the uncivilised and uncleansed soul'.¹¹⁸ As with the soap, the toys were complicit in reinforcing these racially constructed identities. Furthermore, they provided a vehicle by which the imperial citizens of the future could explore, digest and reinforce their own identity, including their conjectured separateness from the colonial 'other'. Attracting and holding the attention of these children demanded that while moral instruction aligned itself with the meanings of power and aspiration, such power and aspiration had to be simultaneously aligned with meanings of difference. Once such difference had been ingrained and adopted, then the imperial citizens of the future could continue the mission to civilise the colonial 'other'.

While Williamson suggests that consumers were just as much 'implicated in the production of meaning' as were the advertisers, Bignell notes that the medium of advertising has the capacity to structure 'ways of thinking about people, products, places [and] ideas'.¹¹⁹ Other toys sold by Graves and engaging in such practices included games, books, annuals, boys' toys and novelties. Depicted as inferior, savage, uneducated, wild, primitive or animalistic, the toys added to the prejudicial weight and cultural circumspection that revolved around the identity of the colonial 'other'. As Barthes was to later argue, the 'myths' produced

¹¹⁷ These images can be seen in a variety of Graves' catalogues held at the Sheffield's local studies library. See boxes 1, 4 and 5. 659.133SSTF.

¹¹⁸ Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders*, p. 24.

¹¹⁹ Judith Williamson cited in O'Barr, *Culture and the Advertisement*, p. 5; Bignell, *Media Semiotics*, p. 16.

through marketing and advertising were far from 'an innocent language [but] pick[ed] up [on] existing signs and connotations and order[ed] [their meanings] to purposefully play a particular social role'.¹²⁰

Such perceptions were cemented into the marketing rhetoric and the production of commodities long before companies such as Graves began operating. However the evidence from the firm provides a clear demonstration that the practice of associating products with traditional constructs continued to permeate the domain of the counter, the consumer and the catalogue. Through the language of advertising and the attachment of labels, these perceptions, representations and cultural divisions were continually being reinforced and cemented into the public consciousness, including the consciousness of young consumers. De Groot notes that 'depictions of wily, sexy Orientals, unfortunate slaves, loyal or dangerous Indians, Sambos and Zulu warriors' all became subjects for consumption.¹²¹ That appetite, while forged from 'educated elites in the eighteenth century - seeking adventure', had, by the nineteenth century captured the attention of a wide audience of consumers.¹²² Spurred on through the journals of travel writers, missionaries' pamphlets and lantern shows, this appetite was added to by music hall productions, cartoons and pantomimes and a profusion of exciting fictional works by such authors as Kipling, Haggard and Henty.¹²³ For De Groot, this literature and engagement with leisure activities brought 'a whole cast of imperial characters for purchase and consumption'.¹²⁴ Cashing in on this sense of adventure and oriental mysticism were firms such as J. G. Graves whose sale of adventure books and pictorial encyclopaedias added to the firm's display of commodities. With images of British expeditions, explorers circumnavigating the globe and depictions of exotic lands, the literature maintained a conceptual ideology of empire. While the white British explorers and adventurers demonstrated their prowess and progressiveness, the colonial natives remained servile, savage and primitive carrying their goods on their heads, wearing scant

¹²⁰ Roland Barthes cited in Bignell, *Media Semiotics*, p. 17. 'Myth' in this context refers to the shaping of a particular message through the use of language and should not be confused with the term 'mythology'. For further explanation see: Bignell, *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹²¹ De Groot, 'Metropolitan Desires and Colonial Connections' p. 176.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.* For further information on the works of Henty and the author's interpretation of identities see: Deirdre H. McMahon. 'Quick, Ethel, Your Rifle!: Portable Britishness and Flexible Gender Roles in G. A. Henty's Books for Boys.' *Studies in the Novel*, 42 (1) Spring, 2010, pp. 154-172 & 203.

¹²⁴ De Groot, 'Metropolitan Desires and Colonial Connections', p. 176.

native clothing and hunting their prey with rudimentary arrows.¹²⁵ Designed to make their audience either laugh or balk, the literature, like the toys, adhered to and promoted an ideology of separate identities. The superior educated metropolitan man and the inferior undomesticated wild savage, the controller and the controlled, the coloniser and the colonised were all connotations that pervaded the pages of children's literature and toys. Ramamurthy argues that such depictions of other races were 'designed to produce a frisson of recognition, of difference, of power'.¹²⁶ For boys this frisson of recognisable difference was enveloped in the portrayal and characteristics of physical and intellectual strength. Courage, valour, honour, duty and perseverance became synonymous with stories of adventure, conquest, triumph and victory. While Raphael Samuel argues that school text books were filled with matters of empire reinforcing 'the ultimate fulfilment of the country's historical mission', Richards suggests that both formal and informal literature aimed at the juvenile 'popularised the ideas of [the] British character to the public'.¹²⁷ Not only, continues Richards, did such literature 'complement and supplement formal teaching,' but it also promoted a simile of 'moral instruction in a palatable fictional format'.¹²⁸

These toys, games and books sold by the firm of Graves clearly conveyed this meaning of difference. They also conveyed the message that despite any engagement with a white and westernised civilised culture, the 'colonial other' would always remain subjugated and inferior. Contemporary concepts on the issues of race pervaded the toys, be them through doll's clothes, the animalistic features of games or the adventure stories featuring heroes, heroines, saviours and subjugators. As Kathryn Castle argues, these dehumanised portrayals infused throughout children's literature were 'recast[s]' seeking to support the empire and ultimately acted as a 'rationale for the maintenance of European dominance'.¹²⁹ However, O'Barr argues that the production of the meaning of any text is a 'collaborative venture [between both] the audience and the original author'.¹³⁰ Arguably this collaborative venture was populated through the commodities sold by firms such as J. G. Graves. Performing the

¹²⁵ These books can be seen in a selection of Graves' catalogues: Boxes, 1 & 4-5), 659.133SSTF SL5L.

¹²⁶ Ramamurthy, *Imperial Persuaders*, p. Xiii.

¹²⁷ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory (Vol 2), Island Stories: Unravelling Britain* (London, 1999), p. 81; Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army* (Manchester, 1997), p. 2.

¹²⁸ Richards, *Films and British National Identity*, p. 2. See also Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, chapters 1, 7, 8.

¹²⁹ Kathryn Castle, *Britannia's Children: Reading Colonialism through Children's Books and Magazines* (New York, 1996), p. 180.

¹³⁰ O'Barr, *Culture and the Advertisement*, p. 8.

roles of educator and advisor, the toys and the literature ensured children's appetites were both continually whetted and fed with the meanings and the messages of empire. Even if customers of Graves never purchased such items, their appearance in a plethora of catalogues and the mass circulation of those catalogues to the homes of consumers gave them the potential to act as a surrogate and supplementary vehicle of knowledge. Essentially both the catalogues and the toys acted as a conduit to reinforce a menu of racial messages, the meanings of which were waiting to be consumed by the imperial citizens of the future.

J. G. Graves: An Ambassador of Empire

While the firm's business programme left little doubt concerning its imperial allegiance, Graves' activities in the public arena gave him an added opportunity to reinforce that allegiance. When serving as Sheffield's Lord Mayor in 1926, the businessman and now prominent civic figure used the public stage to echo his personal views and cement his loyalties. The Prime Minister of New Zealand, Joseph Coates (who had been attending an Imperial conference in London) also visited Sheffield to meet with members of the town's Chamber of Commerce. Tasked with entertaining and accompanying Coates, Graves used the occasion to reinforce his own support and exhort Coates' imperial loyalty. Coverage of the visit along with a speech made by Graves was reported in the local press and Graves' reflection of both men's imperial leanings left the public in little doubt as to where their loyalties lay:

New Zealand has a leader and servant of exceptional powers and complete devotion to his county's interests. The Empire has gained a statesman of wide vision and proven sagacity [and] his services to the Empire are already such as to command our admiration and gratitude. It is a great advantage to us that we should strengthen the bonds between our city and the great English speaking commonwealths of the southern hemisphere and it is good that we should preserve our kinship

with those of our race who are building up strong, self-reliant nations of free liberty-loving peoples.¹³¹

The speech published in the *Sheffield Telegraph* and printed under the heading 'Knitting closer the bonds of empire' clearly signalled Graves' sense of kinship towards the visiting colonial dignitary. Acknowledging Coates as a great statesman, whose loyalties and service to the empire were to be admired, was a rhetoric that oozed with a sense of brotherhood, congeniality and shared values. Yet this choice of narrative clearly demonstrated Graves' grasp of imperial matters and almost certainly had its roots in the resolutions passed at the recent imperial conference in London. As Judd observes, the conference had agreed to rename the empire, the 'British Empire and Commonwealth' and this was significant for those dominions such as Canada, Newfoundland, Australia and New Zealand.¹³² As Judd goes on to note, while Commonwealth lacked the glamour and resonance of Empire, it also lacked its darker reputation and its autocratic overtones'.¹³³ Graves' speech with its brotherly nuances adds gravitas to this observation. Abandoning any association between New Zealand and the darker and autocratic side of empire, Graves concentrated on advocating his affection and approval of the commonwealth's development and clearly signalled a notion of respectable reciprocity. Indeed 'Strengthening the bonds of the commonwealth' and 'preserving the kinship' was a politicised rhetoric chosen to portray a unity between the motherland and the countries entering into this newly formed arena of the Commonwealth. For Judd, the Commonwealth evoked images of mature and sober cooperation rather than proud self-assertion,' and this was certainly reflected in Graves' speech.¹³⁴ However, while the association with New Zealand carried a message of congeniality, the speech also carried the undertones of an old imperialistic rhetoric. These could only be associated with the traditional confines of empire and particularly those that related to issues of cultural division and separation. Graves, aligning his speech to fit in with the meanings and the divisions between empire and commonwealth suggested 'it is good that we should preserve our kinship with those of our race who are building up strong, self-reliant nations of free liberty-

¹³¹ *Sheffield Telegraph* (1st December, 1926).

¹³² Judd, *Empire: The British Imperial Experience*, p. 277-278.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

loving peoples'.¹³⁵ While associating the commonwealth (and its inhabitants) with a kinship, those remaining in the 'Empire' were clearly not 'of our race'. Despite Graves' congratulatory nod to the Commonwealth, the imperial doctrines of servitude and conformity still pervaded the narrative. As the Commonwealth signalled co-operation, congeniality and collaboration, those remaining under its alternative umbrella appeared to linger under the confines of empire's older and darker side. Despite these contradictions, the speech did demonstrate Graves' political awareness of empire and reflected the depth of his knowledge. It also reflected his determination to approach matters of empire as keenly on the civic stage as he did in the world of business.

In summary, the growth of Empire was not just a matter of Britain exercising the country's imperial muscle in an effort to secure territorial dominance; it was also about making those territorial acquisitions work for the benefit of the British economy. Neither did that economy only rely upon the ventures of big businesses, it also involved the minutiae of consumption and the supply of toys, fashions and household implements with imperial connections all involved the activities of firms such as J. G. Graves. Graves quickly identified the economic benefits to be had by trading with the empire and subsequently invested his business acumen in developing a programme of overseas sales. The early development of the firm's Colonial and Foreign Department was a clear indication of its intentions to grow and the articles produced to advertise the department were both imaginative and informative. They not only sent out the strong message of Graves' global operations but also revealed the value the company attached to Britain's empire. Whilst the department's responsibility was to expedite foreign sales efficiently, it was also there to reassure customers that distance need not compromise their needs nor preclude them from obtaining their desires. Indeed the choice and extent of commodities offered for overseas sales equalled those available to the firm's domestic customers. From frying pans to fashion accessories, pocket watches to pen knives and footwear to furniture, the firm's vast array of goods could be purchased, packaged and posted to an array of global addresses. Its guarantee that goods would be safely delivered and not left at foreign or colonial ports was reinforced and reiterated at every opportunity. Aided by the technological advancements of print and the efficient methods of transportation, the company helped to facilitate an

¹³⁵ *Sheffield Telegraph* (1st December, 1926).

expansion of consumer activity that involved small transactions yet on a global scale. Embarking upon such a programme augmented the opportunities for overseas customers and fostered a sense of retailer/consumer interconnectedness; a relationship that Graves felt important for the empire and those working on its behalf.

The marketing literature produced by the firm proved to be a useful tool which allowed it to demonstrate its own support of empire. Whilst the catalogues' main remit was to sell commodities, Graves also used their production as a platform upon which to echo the connotations of empire. From politicised rebukes of what was perceived to be government failings to warnings of unscrupulous overseas trading practices. Furthermore the firm's production of its own marketing literature proved to be a versatile entity as the catalogues provided a vehicle upon which to sell the tangible commodity and where the meanings empire could be wrapped and exported to a plethora of customers both at home and abroad.

The world of the consumer, infused with references to empire not only involved the design and type of commodities but also the nuances and narratives attached to their marketing rhetoric. Whether through the use of imperially loaded language or by applying a series of representational labelling and titling, the association with empire was enhanced and embroidered by retailers seeking to symbolically attach and unify their goods to imperial meanings and messages. While products for the home and the adult became associated with empire, affirming and reaffirming concepts of difference was particularly evident in the design, production and sale of children's toys. In essence the interconnecting themes of empire was continually construed and constructed to maintain an imperial consciousness amongst consumers.

The mail order company of J. G. Graves enabled consumers to satisfy their desires and wants. It also allowed consumers to buy into the latest fashions of mass produced goods, including those with imperial connections. There was an economy of language that pervaded the mail order catalogues and this helped to shape the consumer's experience and connect them to the meanings of empire. Whilst department stores invested in imperial exhibitions, institutions such as the Empire Marketing Board and Empire shopping weeks sought to validate and re-validate this interconnectedness and practices of patriotic

consumption. Companies such as Graves both complemented and augmented this validation. However, unlike the department stores, the meanest of shops and the politicised institutions, the firm, through their mass circulation of catalogues, brought the empire directly to the hearths and homes of consumers. While Graves' business engaged with matters of empire, his role in the civic arena enabled him to publicly display his imperial acumen. His speech made just after the Imperial conference in London demonstrated his political awareness and grasp of imperial matters, including the future of Britain's empire and its past history; one that involved the dichotomies of social awareness, cultural alliances and racial ideologies. While the relationship between the metropole, the colonies and the dominions were showing signs of change, Graves continued to acknowledge that matters of empire played a vital role both in Britain's future and in the world of business. While the empire performed a service for retailing, Graves and his firm performed the role of imperial ambassador.

Chapter Six

J. G. Graves: Occupations, Opportunities and Business Welfarism

Graves' move to Sheffield as a fourteen year old apprentice was intended to teach him a trade and secure his future employment. However his move proved to be as fortuitous for Sheffield and its workforce as it did for the fledgling apprentice. This chapter will discuss and evaluate the activities of Graves as a prominent local employer and advocate of a modernising programme of business welfarism. Initially focussing upon the firm's occupational structure and its employment of women, it will explore what opportunities were open to women, how their roles fitted into and complemented the firm's business structure and how they contributed to the growth of the white blouse sector. It will also evaluate how the firm's female workforce was represented concerning their gender and if that impacted upon their positions, workplace status and opportunities.

The chapter will then examine Graves' approach to issues of business welfare. It will discuss Graves' enthusiasm to introduce a superannuation scheme, the construction of the firm's new modern premises 'Westville' and how its construction represented a modernising working environment in the early twentieth century. The chapter will also examine the social aspects of the firm, the programmes employed by Graves to encourage staff to pursue respectable practices both inside and outside of the factory gates and how these initiatives compared to those of his business contemporaries, Cadbury, Rowntree and Leverhulme. Using both primary and secondary evidence, the chapter will demonstrate that while Graves and his contemporaries were motivated to introduce programmes of business welfare, such programmes also echoed with the values of a Victorian ideology; those of self-help, respectability and responsibility. Furthermore, the evidence will demonstrate that Graves' approach to matters of business welfare approach were as equally centered on profits and production as they were upon the welfare on the workforce.

J. G. Graves: Occupations, Opportunities and Women

The late Victorian period and onwards was a time of change for Britain's female population. Gradually increasing their recognition through such Acts as the Married Women's Property Acts (1870, 1882, 1884 and 1925) the Guardianship of Infants Act (1886) and the

Qualification of Women Act (1907), women were finally beginning to receive some recognition as capable and competent members of society, able to apply reason and logic to their thoughts, actions and deeds.¹ Such recognition was further compounded by the work of the suffragists and suffragettes, the establishment of organisations such as the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, (1897) and the Women's Social and Political Union (1903) whose campaigns for enfranchisement, be them militant or constitutional, placed women more than ever into a central arena of discussion and debate.

While women were challenging their status politically, some were also experiencing changes in their employment opportunities, much of which was propelled by a modernising approach to the business structure and the introduction of new technology. Pertinent to these changes was a growth of the white blouse sector, the occupations of which saw women increasingly occupying the office space and filling the roles of typists, clerks, receptionists and telephonists. As Steinbach suggests, women 'were flooding into white [blouse] work faster than into any other fields'.² Noting that women's employment in the civil service had risen from 4,657 in 1881 to over 27,000 by 1911 and the Post Office had increased its female workforce to 40 per cent by the start of the First World War, Steinbach suggests that the profession of 'clerking [being] clean, light and respectable' not only attracted the attention of the 'aspiring woman' but also lent itself to her 'social expectations'.³ Indeed, Zimmeck contends that 'had (clerking) not existed, it would have been necessary to invent it'.⁴ While securing such employment and occupying the role of white blouse work gave women both a degree of financial security and prestige it also helped to shift the focus for women from the private and domestic to the public sphere.

¹ Married Women's Property Act (1870) granted upper class women the right to retain £200 of their own earnings. Later married women's property Acts recognised wives as individuals and no longer chattels. Guardianship of Infants Act permitted women to become sole guardians of her children upon the death of her husband. Qualification of Women Act permitted women to act as local councillors. For a more detailed list of Acts and Women's Societies see: Chris Cook & John Stevenson, *The Longman Handbook of Modern British History, 1714-1987* (Essex, 1988), pp. 133-134.

² Susie Steinbach, *Women in England*, p. 35.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

⁴ Meta Zimmeck quoted in Steinbach, *Women in England*, pp. 36-37. See also M. Zimmeck 'Jobs for the Girls: the Expansion of Clerical Work for Women, 1850-1914,' in Angela V. John (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England, 1800-1918* (Oxford, 1986), p. 158.

The firm of J. G. Graves provided a wealth of employment opportunities for Sheffield's working-class female population. Ranging from buffers, burnishers and polishers working in the firm's tool and cutlery factory (figure 46) to seamstresses, cutters and haberdashers in the tailoring department and cleaners, packers, postal runners, cooks and waitresses engaged in the firm's depots, offices and staff restaurants.⁵



Figure 46. Portrait of female Barrel Turner employed in Graves' Enterprise works. Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. 'Let's talk of Graves'(circa 1902), p. 8. Local Papers, vol. 261.

Indeed, the size and scale of the company demanded a large and integrated workforce of both men and women. It also demanded a large and efficient administration and opportunities for women within the white

blouse sector were varied. While the statistics of these employees no longer exist, evidence of the workforce and its gendered occupational structure can be gleaned from the company's promotional literature. In both the firm's advertising feature, *Let's talk of Graves* (circa 1902) and in the catalogues, images of the firm's workforce clearly indicates the roles, status and positions of its employees (figures 47-48) with women certainly appearing to

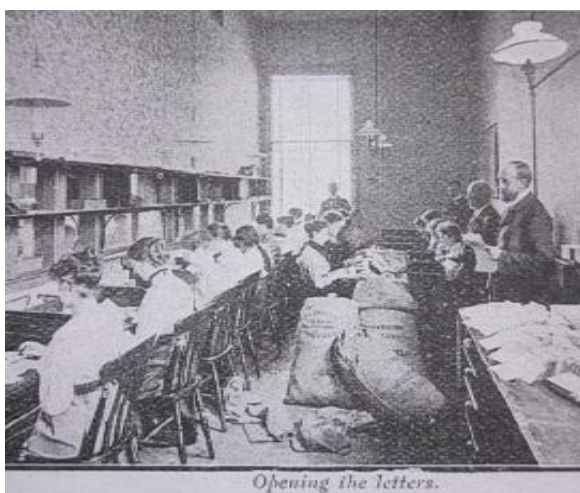


Figure 47. Correspondence Office of J. G. Graves. Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. 'Let's talk of Graves'(circa 1902), p. 4. Local Papers, vol. 261.

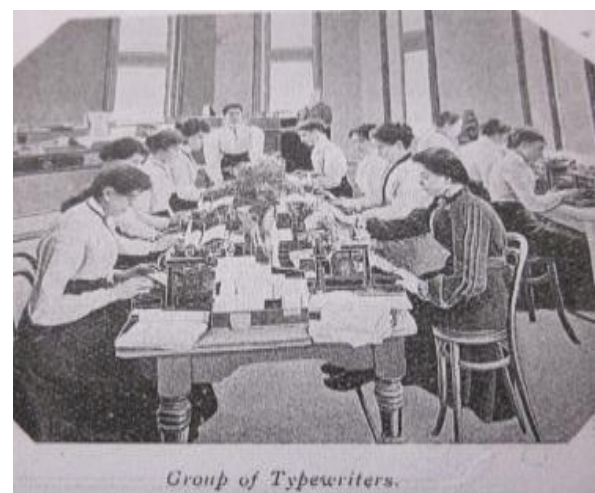


Figure 48. Typing Section of J. G. Graves. Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. 'Let's talk of Graves'(circa 1902), p. 5. Local Papers, vol. 261.

⁵ Figure 46, featured in 'Let's talk of Graves' p.8. Local papers: vol. 26. For further information on Buffer girls, their industry and their heritage see: Gill Booth, *Diamonds in Brown Paper: The Colourful Lives and Hard Times of Sheffield's Famous Buffer Lasses* (Sheffield, 1988).

occupy the roles of correspondence clerks, typists, catalogue compilers and postal clerks.⁶ However, it was men that appeared to be overseeing operations and adopting the roles of managers, middle managers and section heads within these departments. While the advertising department responsible for the compilation and design of the catalogues appeared to attract an equal number of men and women, the firm's accountancy and audit department was clearly dominated by male employees (figures 49-50). There is further evidence of this gendered divide when in 1903 the firm's marketing literature noted that its



Figure 49. Accountancy Department of J. G. Graves. Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies library. Featured in an edition of *Opportunities* (circa 1902) J. G. Graves Catalogue, Box 2, 659.133SSTF.



Figure 50. Audit Department of J. G. Graves. Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. 'Let's talk of Graves'(circa 1902), p. 7. Local Papers, vol. 261.

'Head of Representatives' (the department in control of foreign orders) was Mr. V. Underwood, 'Chief of Organisation' was Mr. R. Bulmer and head of the photographic and advertising sector was Mr. F. Williams.⁷ Such evidence reinforces the arguments of Johnson who, while acknowledging an increase in white blouse opportunities, argues that the career prospects for women seeking to climb this sector of the employment ladder remained significantly restricted in comparison to men's.⁸ However, this was not to say that men in the white collar sector enjoyed unlimited prospects themselves. Indeed, Caplow's analysis of white collar workers suggests that men employed in these areas of work, and particularly those at the lower end of the scale, often felt sandwiched between the decision-makers and

⁶ Figure's 47-50 featured in 'Let's talk of Graves', pp. 4-8. See also *Review of Reviews* (November, 1903), pp. 533-536.

⁷ 'Head of Representatives' and 'Chief of Organisation' featured in *Opportunities*, No. 6 (1903). Head of Advertising featured in 'The art of advertising' *Opportunities*, No. 5 (1903).

⁸ Paul Johnson (ed.), *20th Century Britain*, p. 98.

the decision-followers.⁹ Referring to this positioning as ‘status schism’, Caplow argues that they often felt their positioning within this hierarchical structure left them feeling somewhat at odds with the demands placed upon them.¹⁰ Arguably Caplow’s analysis could also be extended to include the white blouse workers who not only experienced this status schism in terms of roles and responsibilities but also faced occupational limitations imposed by their gender. Effectively not only were these women sandwiched in between the decision-makers and decision-followers but the evidence appears to suggest that they were afforded little opportunity to enter into a managerial role.

For women, such limitations were further compounded by employers who sought to retire them upon marriage, a common practice during the early twentieth century.¹¹ Noting that many employers required their female workforce to ‘remain unmarried and childless’, their prospects of a long term career remained limited by their personal choices and their domestic setting.¹² Such decisions concerning the longevity of women’s employment would not only have impacted upon the firm’s staffing structure but also upon women’s own opportunities to climb the employment ladder. As Giles’ analysis of oral testimonies recorded by women marrying between 1900 and 1939 demonstrates, these white blouse opportunities did not come without their frustrations.¹³ Not only did working class girls ‘expect and aspire’ to marry, but marriage for many women remained the method by which to achieve financial security and indeed took precedence over and above carving out a career.¹⁴ Confirmed by one particular oral testimony, women appeared to accept that work and domesticity were non-negotiable entities: “once married there was no work for women ... you left the office that was it ... it was the understood thing.”¹⁵

Despite these occupationally gendered limitations imposed on women, white blouse opportunities were increasing in both numbers and in appeal. As Steinbach continues, once women had secured such jobs, many found the work and its financial rewards both exciting

⁹ Theodore Caplow cited in Richard H. Hall, *Occupations and the Social Structure* (London, 1969), p. 175.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ There is no evidence to suggest that Graves applied this policy to his female employees, however there were strict guidelines in force concerning their ability to receive their pension when leaving to marry. See section ‘Pensions, Poverty and Providence’.

¹² Steinbach, *Women in England*, p. 35.

¹³ Judy Giles, ‘Playing Hard to Get’, p. 247.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

and liberating.¹⁶ For some they also found that their 'working conditions [were] improving' through the type of environment they were operating in.¹⁷ Graves' white blouse employees, many of whom worked in the firm's new office building, 'Westville', were not only able to embrace this combination of work and prestige but also the comforts afforded by the new building's design.¹⁸ With its modern facilities, clean working environment, programmes of business welfarism and variety of staff social programmes, these female employees were polar opposites of their contemporaries working in the domestic or factory setting.¹⁹ Their occupations and their environment complemented and encouraged the adoption of respectable and responsible practices, and those practices included diligence, neatness, orderliness and punctuality. Graves was determined to carve out an employee structure that reverberated and echoed with those meanings; meanings that were keenly associated with an ideology of respectability and self-betterment. Neither did Graves discriminate with his workforce; rather he encouraged men and women of all ranks to embrace such values and practices. Suggesting in 1902 that his firm was akin to a 'university in which any man, woman or girl might be helped and encouraged to live a good life', Graves married his business programme and his working environment to a narrative of social progress.²⁰ That progress could be nurtured and encouraged both inside and outside of the firm's gates. Furthermore, it had significant meaning for the white blouse workers. As Glucksmann notes in her research on Ford's female workers, the women 'took on the qualities of the work they performed: clean, neat and tidy'.²¹ Expanding on this, Winship suggests that 'a new disciplinary regime [became] tied to chang[ing] work practices' and the semantics of 'nice and clean ... neat ... tidy ... smart and bright' were all codes that signalled the adoption of 'new self-disciplines for women'.²² This symbiotic relationship between the working

¹⁶ Steinbach, *Women in England*, p. 35.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ The construction and design of 'Westville' is explored later in this chapter.

¹⁹ The firm's business welfare and extended work and leisure facilities are explored later in this chapter; however it is worth noting here that female employees enjoyed the benefits of a superannuation scheme, paid holidays and a large programme of social activities, however some of these activities were gender orientated such as sewing circles and girl's guilds.

²⁰ 'Industrial Betterment' in *Opportunities* (1902), p. 5. Re-printed in *Sheffield Daily Independent*, (October, 29th, 1902).

²¹ Miriam Glucksmann quoted in Janice Winship 'New Disciplines for Women and the Rise of the Chain Store', p. 30.

²² *Ibid.*

environment, work ethics, duty and codes of conduct was certainly at the heart of Graves' business empire.

Despite the encouragement of white blouse workers to embrace their new work opportunities (and its associated prestige), their roles and indeed their identity in the workplace maintained an association with the concepts of domesticity and femininity. Nice, neat, smart, bright and clean may have conjured up notions of respectability, but it still veered towards a feminised depiction of women as pure, unsoiled, clean, attentive and virtuous. When in 1903, the *Review of Reviews*'s suggested that Graves' company was 'the employer of the future' and likened its modernising approach to other leading industrialists of the period such as Cadbury, Rowntree and the National Cash Register it also reported on Graves' female employees.²³ Specifically targeting the firm's recruitment of young female apprentices, the report preferred to concentrate on their 'dress, appearance, good looks and general refinement' rather than the tasks they performed.²⁴ While it acknowledged the 'efficiency' with which they worked, the report's gendered and moralising overtone contained in the girls' description maintained this feminised relationship between their identity, their roles as white blouse workers and their occupancy of the workplace.²⁵

Arguably, the concepts of cleanliness, tidiness, neatness and decorum (as identified by Glucksmann and noted by Winship) appeared to be mutually tied by both the women who 'took on those qualities' in their workplace and through the news reports and advertising rhetoric produced during the early twentieth century.²⁶ In essence while in one context the growth of white blouse work levered women away from the private sphere and into the public (and indeed provided a degree of liberation both economically and socially), the environment within which they worked, with its routines, rules and regulations continued to associate and identify women with contemporary values and principles. As Judith Walkowitz

²³ *Review of Reviews*, (November, 1903), p. 542.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 537.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Glucksmann cited in Winship, 'New Disciplines for Women and the Rise of the Chain Store', p. 30.

suggests, women even into the late nineteenth century often remained the 'bearers of meaning [rather than] the makers of meaning'.²⁷

Despite such complexities, the growth of white blouse workers during the late Victorian and early Edwardian period was impressive and it was certainly aided by firms such as J. G. Graves. While early evidence does suggest that limitations were imposed upon the female workforce - for example, in relation to employment status and promotion - the plethora and diversity of the occupations offered by the firm indicates that the company did increase the working opportunities for Sheffield's female population. Whether they were skilled or unskilled, worked in the offices, factories, depots or other staff amenities, their contributions were also vital to the success and growth of the company.

A programme of Business Welfarism: Pensions, Poverty and Providence

Issues of poverty and pauperism even by the late nineteenth century remained a highly contentious issue and attracted a wealth of debates from politicians, social commentators and philanthropic businessmen. The causes of poverty, suggests Edward Royle, were 'cumulative'.²⁸ Low wages, sporadic work, long periods of unemployment, illness, old age and the death of the chief wage-earner were all contributory factors concerning the issue of poverty.²⁹ Seebohm Rowntree, a particularly vociferous campaigner for social reform stated in 1901 that 30 per cent of the population of York were living in poverty, which he went on to argue 'was typical of urban England as a whole'.³⁰ Similarly Charles Booth's report '*Life and Labour of the People in London*' published in 1889 revealed that thirty five per cent of Londoners lived in abject poverty and forty three per cent of the labour force experienced periods of poverty caused by irregular work.³¹ Moreover, such hardship was not just the experience of those physically able yet unable to find work, it was also the experience of those too ill, too old or too frail to maintain their employment, and whose lifetime of earnings had been insufficient to allow them to save and prepare for such times. As

²⁷ Judith R. Walkowitz cited in Simon Gunn, *The Public culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 76. See also J. R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in later Victorian London* (London, 1992), p. 221.

²⁸ Edward Royle, *Modern Britain: A Social History, 1750-1997* (London, 1997), p. 168.

²⁹ *Ibid.* Booth published seventeen volumes of *Life and Labour* between 1889-1903 including a detailed poverty map of London.

³⁰ Hennock, 'Poverty and Social Reform' in Paul Johnson (ed.), *Twentieth Century Britain*, p. 80.

³¹ Royle, *Modern Britain*, p. 168.

Hennock points out, by the 1870s and 1880s the Poor Law 'originally intended to alleviate poverty amongst the able-bodied had been extended to include the aged and the infirm'.³² The figures of this relief were startling, with those aged over sixty five years accounting for thirty per cent of Poor Law recipients compared to three per cent of those sixty years old or less.³³ By the close of the Victorian period, this group of once self-supporting wages-earners, and now welfare dependents, was creating both a moral and a social dilemma and provoking a number of hotly contested debates.

Politicians, social reformers, welfare advocates and high-profile social campaigners all had their own views on how to solve this problem. Their moral, political and financially charged opinions and debates swung between the 'Individualists [who] advocated [programmes of] self-help and thrift' and the 'Collectivists [who] favoured state action' arguing that the problem and its resolution lay firmly at the government's door.³⁴ As Johnson notes, pension provision was fraught with controversies, ranging from those who argued that a poverty-stricken workforce was simply unable to contribute to pension provision and those who suggested that the 'masses' merely lacked 'foresight' and providence.³⁵ The numerous Bills attempting to introduce an old age Pension scheme continued to court controversy right up to its introduction in 1908. In September 1908 the *Westminster Review*, suggested that one reason the working man had been reluctant to financially invest in his retirement had been his lack of understanding about where and how to save.³⁶ However it also suggested that State sponsored pension provision still had the 'difficulty of discriminating between those who have been thrifty and deserving and those who have been unthrifty and idle'.³⁷

As the government attempted to address and solve this financially and morally charged crisis, parliamentary bills continued to be drafted, drawn, contested and disputed. The advocates of a state sponsored pension could, suggested high profile figures such as trade unionist, Henry Broadhurst, cleric and social reform campaigner J. Frome Wilkinson and

³² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

³⁴ Johnson also notes that state action did not just revolve around the issue of retirement but also those who became unemployed or suffered a disability rendering them unable to work. See Johnson, 'Self-Help versus State Help', p. 329.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

³⁶ 'The Old Age Pensions Bill (1908) and After' *Westminster Review* September 1908, p. 334.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

Charles Booth raise people above a 'Threshold of hopelessness'.³⁸ However others such as social reformer Octavia Hill fiercely objected to the introduction of a state sponsored pension and advocated the Victorian values of self-help, thrift and prudence.³⁹ Whilst Hill defined her allegiance to working class help in areas such as better housing, reduction of town squalor and the provision of 'open air sitting rooms for the poor' (green recreational spaces) she felt that 'it was wrong for the State to make any provision for old age through community-assisted schemes'.⁴⁰ Instead, suggested Hill, 'the poor needed the stimulus of having to live up to their responsibilities;' responsibilities, which she argued would be "impolitic" to remove'.⁴¹ It was this plethora of debates emanating from social thinkers, welfare protagonists, trade unions and parliamentarians that both stimulated and stifled the onset of the pension reforms.

During the 1895 general election campaign, Lloyd George outlined his proposed pension scheme but the date when these pensions would finally reach the pockets of those in need was still some way off.⁴² It would not be until the 1907 budget speech that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Herbert Henry Asquith addressed the 'still unconquered territory of social reform' by announcing that the sum of £1,500,000 was to be set-aside each year for pension provision.⁴³ The following year, the King's speech 'contained a definite proposal for old age pensions to be embodied in separate but immediate legislation'.⁴⁴ On the 1st August 1908 the Bill became law and pensions were finally secured. Whilst they contained a series of restrictions, including a qualifying age of seventy (rather than sixty, which the Trade Union Congress had campaigned for), and 'criminals, lunatics and loafers' were disqualified, the non-contributory scheme left the door open for further welfare considerations, including the payment of invalidity and sickness benefits.⁴⁵ In addition, the final decision to introduce

³⁸ Johnson, 'Self-Help versus State Help' p. 335. J. Frome Wilkinson was also founder of an affiliated society for women and wrote extensively on the subject of Friendly Societies. See: 'Mutual Thrift: Social Questions of the Day (London, 1881); 'The Spectator,' 28 November 1891, p. 20.

³⁹ Doreen Collins, 'The Introduction of Old Age Pensions in Great Britain,' *The Historical Journal*, 8 (2), 1965, p. 250.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Grigg, *Lloyd George, The People's Champion*, p.159.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁴⁵ *The Times* (27 August 1908).

a non-contributory scheme also ensured that women, despite their employment circumstances, would also be included.⁴⁶

While provision of state pensions was a vitally important step forward in Britain's welfare reforms, a number of British employers had already begun to address this issue of pensioner poverty. Observing the prospect of pensioner pecuniary facing their own employees, large progressive and forward thinking employers such as Seebohm Rowntree, Edward Cadbury, the Lever Brothers of Port Sunlight and J. G. Graves of Sheffield had begun to take matters into their own hands. By the late 1890s Graves' mail order company was a viable and profitable firm. Not only was it effectively managing its marketing portfolio and realising its financial potential, it was also providing numerous employment opportunities for Sheffield's working class population. The firm's occupational structure including both manual and blue and white collar/blouse workers was growing and its employees ranged from artisans such as jewellers, watchmakers, joiners and carpenters, to managers, middle managers, clerks, cooks, cleaners, postal runners, packers and warehouse operatives. It was a large and occupationally diverse workforce and one which attracted the attention of Graves in terms of employee welfare and particularly that of pension provision.

His interest in pension reform had been stimulated after sitting on the finance committee of Sheffield City Council during 1898-9 and having been asked to oversee proposals for the introduction of a municipal pension scheme.⁴⁷ Having recognised the importance of the scheme and the council's ability to implement such a programme, Graves turned his attention to his own workforce. As a social thinker with a keen interest in welfare agendas, Graves viewed that the lack of pension provision for his own employees was the 'weakest spot in [his] very strong business organisation'.⁴⁸ Noting that it was a responsibility that befell upon all forward thinking employers, he suggested that the introduction of a firm's pension was not only 'humane, fair and just' but would also 'make the lot of those who

⁴⁶ Grigg, *Lloyd George: The People's Champion*, p. 159. For further information on exclusions see: Collins, 'The Introduction of Old Age Pensions in Great Britain', p. 258. For parliamentary proposals, Bills and Acts see: Parliamentary Papers: 'Old Age Pensions, A Bill to provide pensions for the aged poor (18 & 20 June, 1901); Old Age Pensions; A Bill (5 February, 1904); The Old Age Pensions Act (15 October, 1908); Old Age Pensions Amendment Bill (9 February, 1911).

⁴⁷ Graves' intention to introduce a pension scheme for employees was featured in the firm's catalogue *Opportunities* and re-printed in the *Sheffield Daily Independent* (October, 29th 1902). See also *Review of Reviews*, (November 1903), p. 539.

⁴⁸ 'Industrial Betterment' in *Opportunities* (1902), p. 5; *Sheffield Daily Independent* (October 29th 1902).

were bound up with him as comfortable, tolerable and as hopeful as could be'.⁴⁹ Having previously argued that the municipal scheme contained 'nothing which should make any man lose his self-respect', Graves was also keen to point out the mutual benefits of a contributory rather than a non-contributory scheme.⁵⁰ Whilst a contributory scheme was a sensible business proposition in terms of the firm's economic forecast, it was also a proposition interwoven with Graves own values and those of the Smilesean doctrines of self-help, self-fortitude and self-responsibility. Reinforcing his approach that as a responsible employer he 'undertook his role seriously' he also argued that neither did he believe in 'doing everything for the workpeople'.⁵¹ With a clear grasp on the firm's progress, and profits, the pension proposal was not seen simply an act of benevolence.

Such rhetoric took the middle road between the collectivists and the individualists; one that recognised and advocated the need for reform but simultaneously steered away from any association with free handouts or a programme of entire welfare assistance. As Collins notes 'rather than rely upon a worker's character to ensure his saving' there was also an alternative belief 'that a little outside encouragement [could] enable men to help themselves'.⁵² In essence Graves' adherence to a Smilesean philosophy shaped the format of his firm's pension programme. Neither was he alone in adopting this approach. When both Rowntree's and Cadbury's introduced their pension schemes in 1906, some four years after J. G. Graves, they too adopted contributory schemes. For Rowntrees all workers (including females) over the age of twenty-one contributed between two and five per cent of earnings and Cadbury's early policy (which only included men) had a sliding scale of between 2.5 and 5.5 per cent.⁵³ However, Lever Brothers adopted a different approach and when they announced their pension scheme in 1905, they reassured employees that it would be entirely funded 'by contributions from the company'.⁵⁴ Spelling out the details in the firm's staff newsletter, it was explained that for every employee retiring after a minimum of fifteen years of service an annual allowance of 1/60th (multiplied by the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Collins, 'The Introduction of Old Age Pensions in Great Britain', p. 250.

⁵³ Robert Fitzgerald, *Rowntrees and the Marketing Revolution*, p. 231. See also: Campbell-Bradley, *Enlightened Entrepreneurs*, p. 147. On Cadbury see: Ashley & Cadbury, *Experiments in Industrial Organisations*, p. 167.

⁵⁴ This announcement was made in the employees' monthly newsletter, 'Progress' Vol. VI: 65 (February, 1905), p. 44. Port Sunlight Archives.

number of years' service, but not exceeding three hundred pound) would be paid.⁵⁵ In addition, the fund would also apply discretionary payments for those retiring on ill health and for widows with up to four children under the age of seventeen.⁵⁶ While this non-contributory scheme may have initially appeared to be more benevolent than Smilesean in its approach, there was however a caveat. In real terms the amounts to be paid out provided little in the form of comfort. As Lewis points out, the final sums were set low to merely 'stave off absolute poverty' and stimulate programmes of thrift and practices of self-responsibility; a message robustly echoed by Leverhulme himself:⁵⁷

There is no unpleasant taint of pauperising philanthropy in this...those who do not do their duty to the Firm will never retain their position long enough to entitle them to a pension or their widows and orphans to maintenance – the Firm can do without such members of the Staff and their place will be taken by those who will do their duty better.⁵⁸

Despite Leverhulme's non-contributory pension plan, the businessman, as Lewis points out was actually 'Smilesean to the marrow'.⁵⁹

When Graves' announced his pension Scheme in October 1902, it was amidst the grandeur of Sheffield's Albert Hall. All employees, including piece workers, who were to be compensated for any loss of earnings, were encouraged to attend and hear the businessman's plans to secure their financial future.⁶⁰ Heralded as a great move forward for both welfare reform and for the business, Graves spelt out the details of his pension proposal. Every employee would contribute 2.5 per cent of their earnings and the firm would contribute an equal amount. For example, Graves suggested that for those employees earning thirty shillings a week, nine pence would go towards their pension fund and the firm would contribute a further nine pence.⁶¹ Upon retirement at the age of sixty five, and having worked ten years of service, retirees would receive a pension equal to one-

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

⁵⁷ Brian Lewis, *So Clean: Lord Leverhulme, Soap and Civilisation* (Manchester, 2008), p. 117.

⁵⁸ *Progress*, (February 1905), p. 42. See also: Lewis, *So Clean*, p. 117; Standish Meacham, *Regaining Paradise: Englishness and the Early Garden City Movement* (Yale, 1999), p. 188.

⁵⁹ Lewis, *So Clean*, p. 99.

⁶⁰ 'Industrial Betterment,' *Sheffield Daily Independent*, (October 29 1902).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

sixth of their salary.⁶² Those having served fifteen years would receive one quarter and those with a service of twenty years, fifty per cent of their original salary.⁶³ In addition, employees retiring after ten or twenty years through sickness or disability would receive one-sixth or two-sixths respectively.⁶⁴ Employees leaving the firm before retirement would receive back the whole of their contributions they had paid plus any accrued compound interest at two and half per cent per annum.⁶⁵ Women were also to be enrolled into the plan and receive the same benefits as their male counterparts; however, when leaving the firm to get married, they would receive 'as a dowry all [of] the money that they have paid into the pension fund together with an equal amount from their employer'.⁶⁶ While this appeared to be a move forward in the equal treatment of women in the workplace the finer details of the women's reimbursement also revealed Graves' firm grip on Victorian moral values. The dowry, suggested Graves, would only apply providing her marriage took place within three months of leaving the firm.⁶⁷

Despite such moral regulations, Graves' female workforce, unlike their contemporaries at Cadburys, was enrolled into the pension scheme from its outset. The women at Cadburys would have to wait a further five years before their enrolment into a pension scheme would finally be resolved. For Cadbury it was the women's tendency to marry and leave their employment at a young age that created a 'great disparity between the period of service for men and women'.⁶⁸ This, argued Edward Cadbury, made their enrolment into the pension scheme 'impracticable'.⁶⁹ However, in June 1911 the firm established a 'Trust Deed' for its female employees, the terms of which agreed the cost to women would range from sixpence a week for girls under the age of eighteen to one shilling per week for women over twenty-one.⁷⁰ Their retirement age was set at fifty years of age (unlike men's which remained at sixty) and the scheme carried the same conditions as the men's in respect of

⁶² *Review of Reviews* (November 1903), p. 539.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ 'Wake Up! John Bull: A Good Beginning for the New Year,' *Review of Reviews, An Illustrated Supplement*, (February 14 1903), 27: 158, *British Periodicals*, p. 199.

⁶⁶ *Review of Reviews* (November, 1903), p. 539.

⁶⁷ *Review of Reviews* (February 14, 1903), p. 199.

⁶⁸ Ashley & Cadbury, *Experiments in Industrial Organisation*, p. 177.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

disability and death payments.⁷¹ Upon marriage and leaving their employment the women had their own contributions refunded to them.⁷² Women could also be appointed as Trustees of the fund but unlike male trustees they had to be both an employee, and a contributory member of the scheme.⁷³ In June 1911, Cadbury's female workforce could finally view retirement without the substantial threat of pensioner poverty looming over them.

Despite the anomalies and disparities hanging over the issues of pensions, the announcement of Graves' proposed plan at Sheffield's Albert Hall attracted national attention. Spelling out the details of the scheme, the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* suggested that a 'notable experiment in old-age pensions [was] about to be tried [out] by J. G. Graves of Sheffield'.⁷⁴ Similarly, the *Northampton Mercury* and the *Hull Daily Mail* also carried details of the plan and gave their readers a breakdown of the costs and benefits to be enjoyed by Graves' employees.⁷⁵ The *North Devon Journal* headlined the scheme under the title; 'Old-Age Pension Problem, A Munificent Scheme of a Sheffield Merchant' and suggested that 'in years to come the story of J. G. Graves, the Sheffield merchant ... will probably be regarded as one of the most interesting in the history of commerce'.⁷⁶ The report heralded Graves as 'a model employer' who had felt it to be 'the duty of [all] employers to provide for the declining years of those who had served [them]'.⁷⁷ The scheme, suggested the news item, was not only aimed at 'bettering the conditions of employees' but also an attempt 'to solve ... the old-age pension problem'.⁷⁸ For Graves the proposed scheme was not only deemed to benefit the employees but also the firm itself. Indeed the newsworthiness generated by the scheme's proposal and its implementation brought prestige to the company's own portfolio. It also placed Sheffield on the map and highlighted the town's engagement with forward thinking and progressive employers; employers who were not only concerned about profits but also concerned about the national problem of pensioners living in poverty.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 177-181.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁷⁴ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (November 15, 1902), p. 7.

⁷⁵ *Northampton Mercury* (November 7, 1902), p. 8; *Hull Daily Mail* (October 30th 1902), p. 2.

⁷⁶ *The North Devon Journal* (November 13th 1902), p. 7.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

In February 1903 the *Review of Reviews* announced that Graves' superannuation pension scheme had finally and formally been agreed and accepted by employer and employees.⁷⁹ Adding further credence to both the firm and to Sheffield, the reports of the pension's final acceptance became closely linked to calls for a national pension programme. While *The Times* acknowledged that the scheme was 'the first or nearly the first to be adopted by a private firm', *The Globe* suggested that not only will the 'public watch with interest the progress of the superannuation and old-age pension scheme of J. G. Graves' but it also warrants 'careful study at the hands of politicians'.⁸⁰ However the *Dublin Freeman Journal* took J. G. Graves' pension provision a step further. Suggesting that 'while Mr Chamberlain's Old Age Pension Scheme has gone to the limbo of forgotten political panaceas, Messrs J. G. Graves' firm, the universal supply stores of Sheffield, have [already] planned [their] old age pension scheme for [its] three thousand employees'.⁸¹ This, the report continued 'is an experiment the working of which will be watched with interest'.⁸²

Graves' pension programme not only attracted national attention but also led the way and preceded the pension programmes of Leverhulme and Rowntree's (1905) and Cadbury (1906).⁸³ While all of the schemes carried their own variations, these astute leaders of business and protagonists for welfare reform clearly understood that pension provision was both morally and socially progressive. Furthermore, as enlightened employers and economically driven businessmen they also recognised that pension provision was closely linked to their firms' productivity, efficiency and financial stability. Indeed their pension proposals did not solely revolve around a morally induced or altruistic programme of business welfare reform. As Fitzgerald points out in the case of Rowntree's, while 'the cost of pensions was high', the firm's 'hidden costs in terms of ex-gratia awards to ex-employees' were already being made.⁸⁴ In addition, Rowntree's benevolence was such that he often felt an obligation to retain older workers who were not only thought to be less efficient but also

⁷⁹ *Review of Reviews* (February 14 1903), p. 198. See also *Sheffield Daily Independent* (January 31 1903), p. 9.

⁸⁰ *The Times* (February 2, 1903); *The Globe* (February 2, 1903).

⁸¹ *Dublin Freeman Journal* (January 26, 1903).

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ For detailed information on Rowntrees, Cadbury's and Leverhulme's pension schemes see: Fitzgerald, *Rowntrees and the Marketing Revolution*; Lewis, *So Clean*; Charles Dellheim, 'The Creation of a Company Culture: Cadburys, 1861-1931', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 92: 1 (February, 1987), pp. 13-44.

⁸⁴ Fitzgerald, *Rowntrees and the Marketing Revolution*, p. 230.

‘tended to set the pace of output for others’.⁸⁵ Graves, facing the same moral dilemma, associated his pension scheme with three fundamental values. Firstly he argued that it would attract ‘the best and most enterprising people of both sexes’ which would ‘enable [him] to hold his [own] and [maintain] a leading place in the world’.⁸⁶ Secondly it created a sense of solidarity between him and his workforce and initiated ‘a lien’ between him and his employees that ‘serve[d] as a fidelity guarantee for all grades.’⁸⁷ Thirdly, the pension alleviated his conscience and allowed him to ‘honourably and satisfactorily retire [his] superannuated employees instead of turning them adrift’.⁸⁸ Containing both a moral and a business rhetoric, Graves’ statement not only demonstrated his understanding of the country’s national problem of pensioner poverty and the effects this had upon business and productivity, but also demonstrated his awareness of government failings to address the issue. For Graves both productivity and business modernisation was hampered by those employers retaining an older workforce out of sentimentality, compassion and a philosophy of ‘auld lang syne’.⁸⁹ The solution, he argued, was the introduction of a scheme that allowed employers to ‘honourably [and] humanely dispense with [the] services [of those who] were not up-to-date, [were] slow and [who] clogged the [business] machine’.⁹⁰ Indeed, suggested Graves, the pension not only allowed a man having ‘served his time [to] retire with honour’ but ‘this happy euthanasia for the worn-out worker [would] more than recoup the money which [the firm] has contributed to the fund’.⁹¹ Neither Graves nor Rowntrees were alone in this business strategy. In Edward Cadbury’s and George Shann’s publication, *Sweating*, the social reformers and businessmen argued that low wages and the provision of insufficient funds to cover sickness and retirement left labourers unable to maintain ‘a reasonable standard of decency and comfort’ the result of which led to the rapid ‘decline of industrial

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

⁸⁶ *Review of Reviews* (February 14 1903), p. 196.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* ‘Lien:’ term to describe a legal charge upon person or personal property for the satisfaction of some debt or duty. *Collins English Dictionary*, (London, 1975), p. 586.

⁸⁸ *Review of Reviews* (November, 1903), p. 539.

⁸⁹ *Review of Reviews*, (February 14, 1903), pp. 198-199.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

efficiency'.⁹² For Cadbury, employee security and an efficiently run company went hand-in-hand and that necessitated a programme of pensions for a retiring workforce.⁹³

The introduction of the work-based pension scheme criss-crossed the boundaries of both welfare reform and strategic business planning. They were inevitably linked to a growing recognition of poverty being experienced by a retiring workforce and calls for a national pension programme. While it could be argued that the introduction of superannuation schemes promoted an atmosphere of solidarity between employer and employee, they were also, suggests Fitzgerald, part of a welfare package seeking to 'mollify class conflict between the employer/employee, stave off industrial unrest' and promote a 'tangible demonstration of the "unitary" ideal firm'.⁹⁴ This ideal, Fitzgerald suggests, acted as a 'prophylactic against strikes, work disaffection and resistance to managerial direction'.⁹⁵ If Fitzgerald is correct then the pensions were both pacifier and progressive. They were also permeated with remnants of a Victorian paternalistic ethos and gendered moral overtones. While new and attractive to the workforce, their initial plans were drawn up and prescribed under rules dictated by the employer. Neither did they evade the Smilesean doctrines of self-help and self-responsibility; rather they provided an alternative avenue by which to promote the ideology. This may have been self-help in practice but it was still controlled by an employer who oversaw the pension's finer details, including the rate of contributions, the circumstances of final remuneration and in the case of Cadbury's scheme, the rules of exclusion. While businessmen, politicians and social reformers recognised the existence of pensioner poverty and voiced their concerns for reform, the Smilesean ideology continued to pervade the pages of pension reform, regardless of whether they were contributory, non-contributory, privately instigated or nationally sought after. However what the superannuation pensions did do was to provide an added stimulus for government intervention and inevitably the push towards a national pension scheme. They also engendered a new relationship between employer and employee. As such, the pension schemes sat firmly and comfortably within a modernising business structure and within a modernising programme of business welfarism.

⁹² Edward Cadbury & George Shann cited in Dellheim, 'The Creation of a Company Culture', p. 25. See also Edward Cadbury & George Shann, *Sweating* (London, 1907), p. 64.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁹⁴ Robert Fitzgerald, *British Labour Management and Industrial Welfare, 1846-1939* (London, 1988), p. 19.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Business Welfarism: Productivity, Profits and People

The introduction of pension reform in the workplace was a significant move forward in late nineteenth and early twentieth century business welfare policy. Moreover employers such as Cadbury, Rowntree, Leverhulme and Graves continued to address their welfare concerns through a plethora of programmes designed to attract, persuade and encourage the growth of a new employer/employee relationship. Some of these programmes sought to modernise the workplace and initiate a healthier working environment through the provision of modern heating systems, healthy sanitary facilities, adequate lighting, staff restaurants, basic medical facilities and the inclusion of sick pay and paid holidays. These employers also sought to address and encourage workers to engage with healthy, rational and respectable social pursuits, often aided through the provision of educational facilities and programmes, sports clubs, social amenities, workers' debating societies and the publication of workers' newsletters. At the root of this new workplace ethic was both an astute business mind seeking to secure employee loyalty and productivity, along with a moral acceptance that workers' needs had to be addressed. Graves, as an entrepreneur tried to live up to many of his business contemporaries and sought to mould his business programme, his business ethics and his social conscience into a place that was both productive and profitable for the firm and its workers.

While the identity of the nineteenth century entrepreneur as a 'dynamic force for economic and social change' has been challenged and some historians such as Halévy suggests many were 'a class of austere men [who] considered it their two fold duty to make a fortune in business and to preach Christ crucified', others such as Bergier argues that they were men 'with an original mental [and] moral make-up; an innovator [who brought] to fruition new forms of technology, new modes of organising production and new methods of managing labour'.⁹⁶ While these challenges to the identity and business programmes of the nineteenth century entrepreneur will continue to attract debate, and undoubtedly Graves was keen to maximise his profits, he was also primed to address his moral conscience, initiate a programme of business welfare and showcase the success of his business. Appointing well-known architects, Messrs Watson and Holmes (who had previously

⁹⁶Élie Halevy and Jean F. Bergier quoted in Janet Wolff & John Seed (ed.), *The Culture of Capital: Art, Power and the Nineteenth Century Middle Class* (Manchester, 1988), p. 4.

designed Ecclesall Bierlow workhouse) to design a large new centre of administration for his firm, Graves' new building took centre stage in Sheffield's urban fabric.⁹⁷ Located at Western Bank and commanding views over the city and Sheffield's distant hills, the new offices known as 'Westville' opened in 1903 (figure 51). The opening, celebrated with great aplomb received a series of congratulatory and complimentary reports with the journal, *The British Architect* hailing it as a 'tribute to modern architecture' and a building which 'in every way was fitting to meet the needs of modern times'.⁹⁸



Figure 51. Image of J. G. Graves' Head Office 'Westville'. Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. These images featured on the front cover of several of the firm's catalogues. See: J. G. Graves catalogue collection. Boxes 1-4, 659.133SSTF.

With its two large blocks of four and five floors, segregated office space, storage complexes, strong-rooms, waiting areas and inquiry offices, the imposing building signalled the success of one of Sheffield's newest and largest business operatives. It also signalled the growing popularity of British mail order and secured the name of J. G. Graves as one of the industry's leading mail order giants. While externally the building made its mark with a series of aesthetic and culturally poignant details such as flag poles flying the Union Jack, ornamental garden, ferneries, greenhouses and courtyards, internally its modern heating system, lifts, interconnecting corridors polished walnut doors, friezes on the walls and modern internal telephone system tangibly conveyed the success of the company.⁹⁹ Accommodating up to 2,000 of the firm's employees, the staff also enjoyed the benefits of kitchens, sculleries, a discounted restaurant, bathrooms, internal lavatories and a recreation/reading room.¹⁰⁰ It was a building that was both functionally equipped to operate at maximum output and one

⁹⁷ *The British Architect* (October 2, 1903), p. 252.

⁹⁸ Image taken from a front cover of the Firm's catalogue (spring, 1929). Box1 : 659.133 SSTF.

⁹⁹ For a detailed description of the building's proposal and design see: *Sheffield Daily Independent* (October 29, 1902); *The British Architect* (October 2, 1903). Graves also provided staff restaurants at his other premises located at Pinstone Street and Shoreham Street, see: 'Industrial Betterment,' *Sheffield Daily Independent* (October, 29, 1902).

¹⁰⁰ *Sheffield Daily Independent* (October, 29, 1902).

designed to accommodate the firm's growing army of employees. It was also a building whose instigator had invested in an opportunity to embrace his penchant for business welfarism and demonstrated some of his shared concerns on matters of business welfarism with those of his contemporaries. Whilst the *Taunton Courier* suggested that the building's 'sumptuous style' encapsulated both the 'brains and the money' of a leading businessman, the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* acknowledged that Graves' recognition of his 'duty to workers' in taking 'every possible step to make their conditions of labour healthy and attractive' put him on a par with other leading industrialists such as *Cadbury and Lever*.¹⁰¹

Like Cadbury and Lever, J. G. Graves recognised that the provision of favourable working conditions stimulated and engendered a co-operative atmosphere between employer and employee. However that co-operation and mutuality, while progressive, was not solely concerned with the health and welfare of the workers, it was also concerned with the health of the firm's profits. For Fitzgerald, the attention given over to welfare programmes and modernising workplace facilities were not simply fostered from an employer's social conscience but were also about 'maximising company loyalty [and] minimising work disaffection'.¹⁰² Similarly, while Joyce notes that a paternalistic ethos continued to filter into the modernising business, he also suggests that it appeared under the umbrella of a new form of paternalism, one deliberately 'shaped' to accommodate 'workers' sensitivities'.¹⁰³ This shaping was a recognition that whilst the old factory paternalism and the ringing of the factory bell may, as Lewis suggests, have drawn the workforce through the gates, it could not 'inculcate loyalty [or] a willing obedience'.¹⁰⁴ Neither could it 'foster [the] middle class standards of morality and respectability' that many employees were also seeking.¹⁰⁵ For businessmen such as Graves and Leverhulme, this fostering of values formed an integral part of their approach to business. Even the location of Graves' new building had been strategically chosen to reflect these values. 'Being located in a healthy, respectable and pleasant part of Sheffield and opposite to the new University for the city of Sheffield', Graves reinforced his hope that his new premises would become a 'university of life - a life

¹⁰¹ *The Taunton Courier* (September, 30, 1903), p. 6; *The Aberdeen Weekly Journal* (September 30, 1903), page number illegible.

¹⁰² Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and the Marketing Revolution*, p. 219.

¹⁰³ Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*, p. 137.

¹⁰⁴ Lewis, 'So Clean', p. 95.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

in which the conditions of work should be made as pleasant, as healthy and as interesting as they could be'.¹⁰⁶ For Graves, the new building was 'an institution of which Sheffield [had] reason to be proud'.¹⁰⁷ In essence, it was not only a building designed for its functional use, it was also a building of statement and intent, the like of which *The Review of Reviews* suggested, was probably unequalled in Britain.¹⁰⁸ Regardless of its internal veneer and the provision of a healthier working environment, which clearly signalled a modernising approach, its imposing façade upon Sheffield's urban landscape also signalled authority and status. Such buildings did not just symbolise urban modernisation but also had the capacity to symbolically represent meanings. As Gunn notes, 'certainly contemporary commentators saw a clear link between architecture and moral order'.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, they also had the capacity to act as 'huge stone guardians watching over the health and morals of the city'.¹¹⁰ This connection between urban development and the built fabric was not only an 'embodiment of modern rationality' suggests Rabinow, but was intended to 'produce the model citizen alongside a modern society'.¹¹¹

Placing Sheffield on the map of business initiatives and progress while simultaneously publically acknowledging his moral obligation to his employees was exactly what Graves was hoping to achieve. Essentially such practices were a new approach in the scientific management of business, one that both recognised a moral obligation concerning employee welfare and married that obligation to productivity. For Graves, the workplace was not just a place of manufacturing or the depot by which to despatch the firm's commodities, it was also an institution where his own standards, beliefs and philosophies could be applied, fostered, nurtured and encouraged amongst the workforce. Arguably it was also a place where Simmel's modern metropolitan man flourished. In 1903 the German philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel suggested that the newly fashioned metropolitan man (or indeed woman) was having their identities moulded and shaped by the environment in which they

¹⁰⁶ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* (October 29, 1902).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Review of Reviews* (November, 1903), p. 538.

¹⁰⁹ Simon Gunn, 'The Middle Class, Modernity and the Provincial City' in Kidd & Nichols (ed.), *Gender, Civic Culture and Consumerism*, p.116.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Paul Rabinow cited in Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*, p.122.

worked and lived.¹¹² These sensory impressions, suggested Simmel, encouraged the city worker/dweller to become a 'creature of intellect, of punctuality, calculation and precision'.¹¹³ These were values and characteristics knowingly embraced and publicly echoed by Graves; the adoption of which, Graves often pointed out, had led to his own success.¹¹⁴ For Graves, the 'gospel of self-improvement' involved the practice of accepting self-responsibility, adopting programmes of respectability and embracing a culture of accountability.¹¹⁵ Graves was not alone in such thoughts. As Gunn observes, the workplace became a centre for the reinforcement of values and good practices including those of 'punctuality, diligence and attention to appearance'.¹¹⁶ 'Time and time again' argues Gunn, written guides 'stressed the values of self-help, self-discipline and hard work'.¹¹⁷ The modernising metropolitan man and woman were constantly bombarded with literature encouraging them to behave responsibly and respectably and such values, suggests Gunn, were 'espoused vehemently by commercial, professional [and] industrial employers'.¹¹⁸

For J. G. Graves, cementing this host of cultural values and workplace ethics did not just concern issues of punctuality, diligence and self-motivation. Indeed these could have been encouraged simply by offering workers a series of inducements, such as the prospect of promotion, bonuses or salary increases. It was also about encouraging employees to pursue the respectable and the rational, to adopt the values of self-worth and self-fulfilment and to take a degree of responsibility for their own personal growth and development. To encourage these practices, Graves' new building included a series of 'in-house' facilities, including two reading rooms for self-education, a conservatory for quiet contemplation and a fully equipped gymnasium to promote healthy and rational recreation.¹¹⁹ The restaurant at Westville provided discounted healthy meals as did additional restaurants located at the firm's other premises, Pinstone Street and Shoreham Street, the provision of which was

¹¹² Georg Simmel wrote extensively on the metropole and its effects in the development of the modernising man. See: Georg Simmel, *The Metropolis and Mental Life: An Essay* (Berlin, 1903); David Frisby & Mike Featherstone (ed.), *Simmel on Culture* (London, 1997).

¹¹³ G. Simmel quoted in S. Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*, p.124.

¹¹⁴ Graves, 'Some Memories'.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹¹⁶ Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 74.

¹¹⁷ Simon Gunn, 'The failure of the Victorian middle class,' in Janet Wolff & John Seed (ed.), *The Culture of Capital*, p. 23.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹¹⁹ *Sheffield Daily Independent* (October 29, 1902).

certainly on a par with the efforts of his contemporaries, Rowntree and Cadbury.¹²⁰ Encouraging workers to pursue what was perceived to be responsible, respectable and healthy could be fashioned and framed by providing incentives and facilities easily accessible during the working day. Indeed standards could be set and respectable characters forged by a workplace that functioned as a conduit to promote moral growth. Rowntree summed this philosophy up in 1904 when he suggested that ‘probably more beneficial influence upon the character of the working classes may be exercised through the medium of their places of employment than is at present exercised by the churches’.¹²¹ The examples set by Rowntree were, according to Fitzgerald, sounding the end of ‘small-firm paternalism’ and heralding in a new programme of organised business welfarism.¹²² Yet while these welfare programmes certainly embraced a progressive approach in terms of work place facilities and working environment, the encouragement to pursue the respectable and the responsible through such inducements still echoed with a hint of paternalistic and patriarchal reverence. Robert Owen writing from New Lanark in 1813 had previously argued that ‘any general character, from the best to the worst, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened, may be given to any community...by the application of proper means, which means to a great extent [are] at the command and under the control of those who have influence in the affairs of men’.¹²³ For Owen, such influence had a role to play both inside and outside of the factory gates. ‘Training children’ in ‘good habits,’ offering ‘rational education’ and directing ‘useful labour’ were the fundamental requirements needed to promote society’s health and happiness.¹²⁴ Indeed, under ‘judicious management’ such practices would ‘ultimately mould that moral character’ seeking ‘rational wishes and [rational] desires’.¹²⁵ The New Lanark mill ascribed itself to fulfil these visions through the provision of ‘rooms for innocent amusements and rational recreation - gardens and walks [for] health [and] gratification with nature’ and ‘schools, lecture rooms and a church’ for the provision of moral and educational nourishment.¹²⁶ Following New Lanark’s

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Seebohm Rowntree quoted in: Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and the Marketing Revolution*, p. 237. See also Budgett Meakin, *Model Factories and Villages: Ideal Conditions of Labour and Housing* (New York, 1905), p. 33.

¹²² Fitzgerald, *Rowntree and the Marketing Revolution*, p.237.

¹²³ Robert Owen, *A New View of Society: Essays of the Principle of the Formation of the Human Character and the Application of the Principle to Practice* (Re-print, New York, 2013), p. 21.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-60.

establishment in 1785 was Titus Salt's model village 'Saltaire' in 1853 which bore many similarities both in its urban construction and moral instruction. Again seeking to instil the characteristics of respectable, rational and healthy lifestyles amongst his workforce, Salt provided dining rooms, reading rooms, schools, a Mechanics Institute, a three thousand seater concert/lecture hall and recreational parkland.¹²⁷ In essence both New Lanark and Saltaire laid the foundation stones of what was to follow. While Graves could not realistically achieve the vast programmes of his predecessors or indeed those of his contemporaries, Leverhulme's Port Sunlight, Cadbury's Bourneville or Rowntrees model village in New Earswick, the provisions and amenities he did seek to provide reflected the same philosophy; provide, encourage and stimulate a desire to socially and morally progress.¹²⁸

Beyond the Factory Gates

For Graves and his business contemporaries, attention to the pursuit of the respectable and the rational did not stop and start at the firms' gates. Outside the workplace, Graves and other leading businessmen continued to encourage their workers to pursue respectable and responsible standards; standards that reflected good citizenship and good moral practices. In a similar way to the practices of Cadbury, Rowntree and Leverhulme, Graves' employees were encouraged to establish a wide range of social activities, including reading and literary groups, debating societies, choirs, girls' guilds, sewing circles, sports teams, rambling associations, operatic ensembles and drama groups.¹²⁹ Not only were they designed to be socially inclusive and draw upon the concepts of workforce unity, they also signalled their disassociation from working class recreational activities associated with alcohol, public houses and gambling.

¹²⁷ For further information concerning Saltaire and the Salts Mill, see: Maggie Smith & Colin Coates, *Salts Mill: The Owners and Managers, 1853-1986* (Gloucester, 2016); Gary Firth, *Images of England: Salt and Saltaire* (Gloucester, 2012).

¹²⁸ Graves did provide a series of houses for the elderly which are discussed in further detail in chapter 7.

¹²⁹ Both male and female employees were encouraged to pursue healthy and respectable activities but there was an element of gendering in these through such groups as sewing circles and girls guilds. For reference to the various social groups, see: *Review of Reviews* (November 1903), p. 541; 'Let's Talk of Graves', p. 27.

The pursuit of healthy recreational practices was a clear objective of Graves and his purchase of land for the development of a sports and recreational club in Pitsmoor, Sheffield (figure 52) sent clear signals of his ambitious project.¹³⁰ It also heralded the businessman's determination to cement a philosophy of unity and loyalty amongst his large workforce. As well as encouraging the development of an Athletic Association, the ground also provided facilities for a range of sporting activities including football, cricket and gymnastics. Families were encouraged to attend the matches, witness the display of gymnastics and enjoy and participate in sporting events. Graves also took the ground's success as an opportunity to relay and reinforce the message that work and recreation were both interconnecting and interdependent. The facilities, suggested Graves, were not only 'given [over] for the healthy amusement' of the firm's staff but were also invaluable for 'every great commercial firm [meaning] to win and keep front rank honours'.¹³¹ It was a



Figure 52 image of Roewood Athletic Ground. Courtesy of Sheffield Local Studies Library. *Review of Reviews* (November, 1903), p. 542.

place, argued Graves, where 'his great industrial army' could be 'cement[ed] together', where the 'difference of position [could] be forgotten' and where 'managers, heads of departments and rank and file [could] meet on equal terms [and] acquire that sense of comradeship'.¹³² While Davies notes that employers began to 'replace the civic elite as the moral guardians of popular leisure pursuits', Jones argues that it was the 'humanitarian' employers and their provision of 'extensive leisure facilities and advice on good citizenry'

¹³⁰ Figure 52 featured in 'Let's Talk of Graves', p. 26.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

that instigated 'the moral as well as the economic case for enlightened capitalism'.¹³³ As Beaven points out, 'an employers' investment in wholesome out-of-work entertainment' not only aided 'national efficiency' but could 'boost labour productivity'.¹³⁴ It seems that Graves had grasped this aspect of business philosophy and placed it high on his agenda.

The purchase of Roewood sports ground at Pitsmoor facilitated the dual purposes of rational recreation and worker unity. However much grander than Graves' recreational programme were the facilities at Leverhulme's Port Sunlight. Encouraging the pursuit of sports such as gymnastics, tennis, cycling, football and cricket, Leverhulme ensured that his model village with its expansive recreational facilities was both inviting and inclusive. The centrepiece of Port Sunlight was its outdoor swimming pool. Measuring one hundred feet long by seventy five feet wide and able to be heated in cold weather, membership of the pool reached over three hundred and fifty employees as they participated in swimming, water-polo and life-saving classes.¹³⁵ While Graves did not match the much grander and more extensive programmes embarked upon by his contemporaries, his visits with Leverhulme at Port Sunlight and Cadbury at Bourneville had resulted in a recognition of their 'mutual interest' concerning these wider aspects of business welfarism.¹³⁶ The *Review of Reviews*, heralding Graves as an 'employer of the future' likened his welfare efforts to those of Leverhulme and Cadbury and went on to suggest that it was only through the efforts of entrepreneurs such as J. G. Graves that businesses were beginning to 'slowly [wake] up to the boundless possibilities [waiting to] be realised under the new régime of mutual interest and mutual co-operation.'¹³⁷ 'We are witnessing today', the report continued, 'the passing of [an] old dispensation under which employees were merely [seen as] hands'.¹³⁸

Graves' extended welfare approach and the marrying of business welfare with a civic consciousness added both weight and influence to the development of Sheffield's socio-

¹³³ J Mcg. Davies & Stephen P. Jones cited in Brad Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men*, p. 9. See also: Bill Lancaster & Tony Mason (ed.), *Life and Labour in a 20th Century City: The Experiences of Coventry* (Coventry, 1986); Stephen P. Jones, *Sport, Politics and the Working Class: Organised Labour and Sport in Inter-war Britain* (Manchester, 1992).

¹³⁴ Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men*, p. 9.

¹³⁵ Walter L. George, *Labour and Housing at Port Sunlight* (London, 1909), p. 125.

¹³⁶ Graves, 'Some Memories', p. 38. For references to Cadbury's and Rowntrees recreational and welfare facilities see: Campbell-Bradley, *Enlightened Entrepreneurs*, pp. 120-139 and 140-155.

¹³⁷ *Review of Reviews*, (November, 1903), p. 542.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

cultural scene. While sporting events provided healthy recreation, sewing circles encouraged the development of practical skills and the girl's guild embraced the younger workforce, the firm's choral group and operatic, drama and literary societies echoed their association with a middle-brow culture. Similarly Graves' provision of illustrated lectures (often by well-known speakers), the firm's annual Dinner and Ball (held at the Sheffield Barracks) and the staff summer tea parties (held by Graves and his wife, Lucy at their home in Riverdale) added to this respectable cultural ethos.¹³⁹ Indeed the Ball and other engagements such as the firm's musical evenings were intended to give both employer and employees time to reflect on their endeavours and congratulate each other on the firm's success. When in 1902 a group of employees represented the firm in a Sheffield music festival, Graves personally attended and later described it as 'a resplendent evening' as he listed to Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*, the *Coronation Ode* and Mendelssohn's *Messiah*.¹⁴⁰ The programme, suggested the article (and printed in an edition of *Opportunities* for the benefit of the firm's customers) was a clear demonstration of the staff's talents and a 'credit [to] Sheffield in the noblest of all forms of competitive art'.¹⁴¹ Engaging with his workforce went far beyond the factory gates and while not on an equal footing it was Graves' intention to ensure he played a pivotal role in their working lives and be involved in their social ones too. Through both newspaper reports and through the articles inserted into the company's catalogues, Graves ensured that both the public and customers were kept abreast of the firm's programme of business welfarism.

In summary, while his investment in employee welfare made good sense for the firm, it also sent out a strong message that entrepreneurs such as him were no longer simply content to focus on programmes of economic remuneration at the expense of their workforce. As a leading local employer he also augmented the employment opportunities for both men and women. However, certainly in the early days of the firm's operations, women's opportunities did appear to be limited while men dominated the positions of managers, middle managers and section heads. Yet, while women's roles were restricted, unlike some of their contemporaries in other industries, they were equally enrolled into the firm's pension scheme from its outset. Graves' pension scheme pre-dated those of Cadbury,

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 541. See also: 'Let's Talk of Graves' p. 27.

¹⁴⁰ *Opportunities* (1902), p. 3. Box 1: 659.133 SSTF..

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Rowntree and Leverhulme and while it was a programme that engaged with the economies of business and productivity, it was also welfare orientated. Furthermore, the national attention and publicity it generated paved the way for its wider implementation across other businesses, and that sounded the bell on this aspect of pensioner poverty.

Graves like many other leading businessmen of the period such as Cadbury, Rowntree and the Leverhulmes embraced a new approach to their programmes of business welfare. The benefits of paid holiday leave, sick pay, the provision of discounted restaurants and in-house facilities such as recreation, reading rooms and conservatories provided a healthier working environment. The facilities encouraged the pursuit of the respectable and the rational and Graves' efforts, which bore many similarities to the programmes of Cadbury, Leverhulme and Rowntree, arguably put him on a par with his contemporaries. The inducements, programmes and provision of amenities also stimulated a growth of staff social clubs and events and these were added to by invitations to tea parties at Graves' own home, the firm's annual Ball and other festive celebrations. However these were not just social engagements and exercises intended to engender a co-operative and inclusive working spirit but were also culturally attuned to fit in with and adhere to programmes of respectability. They signalled propriety and responsibility, social betterment and cultural attainment and employees' participation in these events clearly signalled that the end of the working day did not mean an end to the practice of such values. In essence acknowledging and embracing these programmes was about engagement with a lifestyle and that lifestyle involved both the workplace and the home. By the early 1900s J. G. Graves had made his mark both in the business of mail order and as a progressive employer. He had also made his personal financial fortune. However it was in Sheffield's civic arena that this businessman left his most profound legacies and it is those legacies that the final chapter of this thesis intends to explore.

Chapter Seven

J. G. Graves: Sheffield's Fairy Godfather?

At the same time that Graves was establishing his acumen for business, he was also developing a fondness for the town that had given him an opportunity to establish his place in the world of retailing. It was a fondness that not only catapulted him onto the civic stage and into the local political arena but also into a wealth of philanthropic programmes. It is the intention of this final chapter to explore the extraordinary relationship that developed between the city of Sheffield and this businessman whose legacy continues to enrich the city and the public lives of its citizens today. It will examine Graves' initial impressions of Sheffield and evaluate how these impressions were forged within an environment of social deprivation, heavy industry, poor housing and a vibrant political scene. It will also evaluate the extent to which Graves sought to engage with local politics. It will discuss his campaign speeches and attempts to engage the public audience and the electorate, examine his roles and activities as councillor and Lord Mayor and explore how those roles influenced the modernisation and progression of Sheffield's social, urban and cultural fabric.

The final part of the chapter will examine the diversity of Graves' philanthropy, from his gifts of recreational parkland and concerns over conservation and preservation, to his involvement in Sheffield's arts and cultural scene, education, social welfare, housing, and health. It will explore Graves' entrance onto the philanthropic stage and examine how these activities promoted respectable and responsible practices, how such values related to the activity of philanthropy and how Graves validated that relationship in a city heavily populated by the working classes. Engaging with the work of Alison Twells and her analysis of the changing nature of missionary philanthropy, the chapter will argue that Graves' keenness to address the social, moral and welfare needs of the working class population through philanthropic activity was part and parcel of his commitment to liberal notions of progress and civilisation.¹

¹ Twells, *The Civilising Mission*.

Sheffield: Light and Enlightenment

Recalling his feelings after arriving in Sheffield in 1880, Graves suggested that his first impressions of the town was that of a “smoky, gloomy place, whose people were deprived of the joys of nature and open air.”² Yet, continued Graves, it also had all of the character of “a great overgrown village.”³ This ‘great overgrown village’ was a town known for its metal works, artisanal occupations, heavy industry and pockets of radical political activism. Sheffield had attracted its fair share of negative commentary, as seen in the narratives of a range of social commentators, travel writers, surveyors and moral reformers. For example, in the early 1700s, Daniel Defoe had described the town’s streets as ‘narrow’ and the ‘houses dark and black’.⁴ A century later, in 1851, Samuel Sidney reflected in his travel journal that the town’s conduit of ‘warehouses, factories and mean houses zig-zagging up and down [its] slopes, left it both ugly and gloomy’.⁵ At the same time, Friedrich Engels, German philosopher, journalist, industrialist and member of the Communist party, honed in on the town’s young population, suggesting that their ‘immorality... seem[ed] to be more prevalent than anywhere else’.⁶ In 1861, the architectural journal *The Builder* reported that Sheffield’s sanitary provisions were ‘behind those of Birmingham, Stafford, Wolverhampton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Shrewsbury’.⁷ The report was damning in its detail: ‘the three rivers sluggishly flowing through the town are made the conduits of all imaginable filth ... they are polluted ... the embankments are ragged and ruined ... here and there [they are] overhung with privies and [are] often the site of ash, offal heaps [and the] most desolate and sickening objects’.⁸ Joseph Fletcher reiterating these points thirty years later wrote ‘in the streets there is a substratum of dust and mud; in the atmosphere a choking something

² ‘Looking Back: Apprentice who became Sheffield’s greatest benefactor’, Sheffield Newspaper Cuttings, vol. 25, p. 126. 942.74SF SLSL.

³ Graves, ‘Some Memories’, p. 10.

⁴ Daniel Defoe quoted in Paul Bedford, ‘Work, space and power in an English industrial slum: ‘the crofts’, Sheffield, 1750-1850’, in: Alan Mayne & Tim Murray, *The Archaeology of Urban Landscapes: Explorations in Slumland* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 107.

⁵ Samuel Sidney. ‘Rides on Railways’ (London, 1851) quoted in Ruth Harman & Roger Harper, ‘The Architecture of Sheffield’, p. 33.

⁶ Friedrich Engels quoted in Bedford, ‘Work, space and power’, p. 107.

⁷ *The Builder*, 19 (September, 1861), p. 641. See Also, Allan M. Craven, ‘Housing Before the First World War,’ *The History of the City of Sheffield, 1843-1993* (ed), V II: Society (Sheffield, 1993), p. 66.

⁸ *The Builder*, 21 (September, 1861) quoted in David Hey, *History of Sheffield*, p. 235.

appears to take a firm grip of one's throat ... the inky waters of river and canal, the general darkness and dirt of the whole scene serves but to create feelings of repugnance and even horror'.⁹ Concluding, Fletcher suggested that 'the prevailing characteristic of the place is utility...stern, hard and practical'.¹⁰

The nature of industry and population growth was clearly a factor. Sheffield, like many other industrial towns such as Birmingham, Bradford, Leeds and Manchester had begun to reach 'terrifying proportions' by 1851.¹¹ With a population rise in Sheffield of 22.4 per cent between 1841 and 1851, much of the town's housing stock began to take the form of back-to-back houses.¹² Often centered amidst the courts, alleyways and rookeries, these Sheffield dwellings (over 38,000 by 1865), contained on average a floor space of 150sq feet.¹³ Rooms measuring only 12ft square afforded little privacy and their cramped conditions and poor ventilation painted a sorry image of the living conditions for Sheffield's working-class population.¹⁴

Sheffield also had a reputation for being resistant to philanthropic reform. As Twells points out, 'middle class reformers had battled for decades with a popular culture renowned for its wilful distance from polite society', a culture thought to stem from the "'little Mester'" system of production which saw men simultaneously working as employees and employers'.¹⁵ It was a culture which had strong links to political radicalism, from the French Revolution, the Chartist movement and growing trade unions and trade associations.¹⁶ Despite these battles between an independent working class and middle class reformers, other historians note some changes occurring from around the mid-century. Sidney Pollard argues that by the 1860s there were signs of a 'taming of the working-class movements into a Victorian respectability'.¹⁷ Much of this, he argues, was aided through the restructuring of

⁹ Joseph S. Fletcher, 'A picturesque History of Yorkshire,' (1899), quoted in Hey, *A History of Sheffield*, pp. 237-238.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹¹ John Burnett, *A Social History of Housing*, p. 7.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 57 & 74.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.74-75.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁵ Alison Twells, 'Iron Dukes and Naked Races: Edward Carpenter's Sheffield and LGBTQ Public History' *International Journal of Regional and Local History*, Vol. 13: 1 (2018), p. 53.

¹⁶ Sydney Pollard 'Labour' in Clyde Binfield (ed.), *The History of the City of Sheffield, 1843-1993*, V II: Society (Sheffield, 1993), pp. 260-266.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

organisations such as the Trades Council which started to include membership of printers, building workers and others from general trades along with the introduction of the 1867 Reform Act which extended the franchise to all those householders paying rates.¹⁸ There was, suggests Pollard a 'new trend of socially responsible liberalism' setting out its stall 'to attract [the] working class voter'.¹⁹ While this did not 'necessarily mean an acceptance of middle-class precepts', there was both a 'growth of mutual recognition' and a 'deeper change of attitude on the part of working men and women as respectability became the aim of ever wider circles of dwellers in working class areas'.²⁰

Mary Walton's analysis of Sheffield also points to signs of change. Observing the development of educational facilities, Walton notes that only three years after the Public Libraries Act of 1856, Sheffield opened a library in its Mechanics Institute in Surrey Street.²¹ Sheffield was, argues Walton, the first town in Yorkshire and the eleventh in the country to provide such facilities; facilities which she goes on to suggest 'have made the greatest contributions to adult education of any single institution'.²² Furthermore, not only did the library show favourable lending results but the figures of borrowing when compared to the literacy rates were large and the greatest number of borrowers were 'drawn from the poorer-paid classes'.²³ For Walton, 'aspiration was there' and such lending figures for books clearly demonstrated a 'desire for self-improvement'.²⁴ Similarly Caroline Reid's analysis of Sheffield's mid-Victorian socio-cultural scene concludes that along with a 'network of social institutions' and with a 'middle class initiative from above in conjunction with a working class self-help from below' the forging of an ethic of respectability was present.²⁵ This was not 'just a statement of middle class consciousness but an ideology which united the middle class with sections of the working class in a vertical relationship'.²⁶ It was within this politically charged and socially challenging environment that J. G. Graves was to establish his

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 267. For details of the Reform Act see: Cook & Stevenson, *Modern British History*, p. 67.

¹⁹ Pollard, 'Labour', p. 267.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 267-8.

²¹ Mary Walton, *Sheffield: Its History and its Achievements* (Sheffield, 1948), p. 223.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Caroline Reid, 'Middle Class Values and Working Class Culture in Nineteenth Century Sheffield: The Pursuit of the Respectable,' in Sydney Pollard & Colin Holmes, *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire* (Sheffield, 1976), pp.280-281.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

business and develop his fondness for Sheffield. It was also within this environment that Graves would impart his own ideas and values on both the civic stage and through his programmes of philanthropy.

Graves was keen to enter into the local political arena and in 1896 he courted the electorate and won his first seat as a local independent councillor for the district of Nether Hallam. He fought his campaign over a number of issues all of which demonstrated his keen awareness of both local politics and Sheffield's social and welfare needs. In his campaign speech held at Gleadless Road Board School he rebuked the policies of unequal representation. Noting that while Sheffield's St. Phillip's Ward had 2,755 voters represented by six members compared to Nether Hallam with 11,500 voters but with the same number of members, Graves begged the question 'what was there about the interests of St' Phillips Ward that the people there required almost five times more representation than those in the Nether Hallam Ward?'²⁷ For Graves this was 'a scandalous system of representation' and was an issue that 'he would take a special interest in if he was elected to the council'.²⁸ Issues over fair and equal representation were not the only subjects that Graves chose to address. In his campaign speech at Walkley in 1896, he rebuked past councillors for failing to address the town's poor sanitation, arguing that Sheffield's 'midden and privy system was not only out of date' but the 'filthy and abominable messes [created by the] tips were an especial evil in places where numbers of houses stood together in a single yard'.²⁹ Other recognition of the town's social needs included his support for the construction of 'municipal artisan dwellings' and 'model lodging houses,' the open disbursement of rate-payers money, disposal of the town's waste and control of the town's 'drink traffic'.³⁰

Graves also called for a fairer system of education and an end to the injustice levied by the central schooling system.³¹ Privileged access to education, argued Graves, was not only unjust, but 'money ought not to be wasted on the ignorant [just] because they could afford it'.³² Calling for the implementation of a 'scale ladder' to pay the entry fees into 'Sheffield's technical school [and] university' Graves suggested that 'every working man's lad' should be

²⁷ Graves campaign speech at Gleadless Road Board School (1896) J. G. Graves election papers, 6452M, SLSL.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Graves campaign speech at Walkley Church School (1896) Nether Hallam election papers, 6452M, SLSL.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Graves campaign speech at Gleadless Road Board School (1896) J. G. Graves election papers, 6452M, SLSL.

³² *Ibid.*

given equal access to education.³³ To 'make the most of [this] city', argued Graves, we need to provide the 'best educational advantages', and procure 'the best thought and the best ability'.³⁴ Having fought the campaign and his Conservative opponent, Reuben Thompson (who himself was a local businessman), Graves won the election and served the ward of Nether Hallam until the next election when in 1902 he lost his seat. However his period in office gave Graves an opportunity to address some of his social and welfare concerns and he served on the Water Improvements committee, Sewerage and Highways, Tramways and Roads and the town's general Improvement Committee.³⁵

Despite losing his seat in 1902, Graves fought back and in 1906 after standing as a Liberal candidate won the seat for the Walkley Ward. Apart from a brief spell from 1908-1916 when he left the political scene to concentrate on his business he remained an active participant in local politics until his retirement in 1939. Venturing onto the political stage gave Graves an opportunity to immerse himself into the social and political agendas that concerned him. Between 1906 and his retirement he sat on a range of council committees, including the Finance Committee responsible for overseeing the allocation of ratepayers' funds.³⁶ He also oversaw a host of programmes that helped to re-fashion and re-structure Sheffield's urban fabric, from the construction of roads, highways and tram routes to street lighting, improvements to household sanitation, provision of clean water and the safe disposal of the town's waste.³⁷ In addition to his political roles, he added to his civic portfolio by sitting as a local magistrate and Justice of the Peace.³⁸ He was also awarded the freedom of the city and in 1926 was elected Lord Mayor.³⁹ As a local councillor Graves made clear his intentions to work for the betterment of Sheffield's population and the modernisation of the town. Reinforcing the responsibilities of elected councillors and calls

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ For a selection of references to Graves' councillor roles see: Water and Sanitation, *Council Minutes Book*, (1898-99), pp. 14-15 and p. 161; *Year Book of Information* (1899), p. 62; Improvement Committee: *Council Minutes*, (1898), p. 272 and *Council Minutes* (1898-1899), pp. 12-18; Finance Committee: *Year Book of Information*, (1906), p. 62.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ For a chronology of Graves' civic activities see: Barnes, 'J. G. Graves: Sheffield Businessman, Art Collector and Benefactor', pp. 49-53.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

for fair representation, he repeatedly argued that the town's ratepayers deserved to be 'fully represented' and receive the 'attention and undivided efforts' of their councillors.⁴⁰

Having established his status and reputation in business and gained knowledge of his local environment, entrance into the political arena for figures such as J. G. Graves was somewhat inevitable. Thomas Adam argues, that the mid-late Victorian period marked a significant change in English philanthropic activity, as the 'established elites of merchants and landowners [began to] face an increasingly affluent and assertive group of industrialists and capitalists' who were intent on making their own mark in the city.⁴¹ Similarly Gunn notes that in Leeds and Birmingham 'the numbers of businessmen on municipal councils increased in the last decades of the nineteenth century'.⁴² Yet this entry of middle-class men onto the local political stage had its roots much earlier in the century through the philanthropic supporters of moral and social reform. As Twells argues in her study of missions and philanthropy, in the 'early decades of the nineteenth century', the make-up of the 'missionary philanthropists [consisted] of the men and women of the newly emerging English middle classes'.⁴³ 'Largely evangelical' and drawn from the 'merchants, manufacturers, clergymen, journalists and other professionals' these middle class philanthropists aimed to 'infuse the English nation, its cultural life and its polity, with Christian principles and moral systems'.⁴⁴ Twells shows that by the 1830s, many of the 'principal seat-holders within voluntary associations – the chairmen, treasurers and secretaries - occupied important positions as Overseers of the Poor, town trustees and members of committees [responsible] for street-lighting, highways, gas and water companies - the general infirmary and the [town's] dispensary';⁴⁵ that is, they were 'central to the administration of urban affairs prior to [Sheffield's] incorporation'.⁴⁶ Furthermore, such activities established 'benevolence [as] a central characteristic of a reformed Christian middle-class manliness [that] prided itself on its sensitivity, morality and guidance to others'.⁴⁷ However, for Graves, it was less about infusing Sheffield's citizens with Christian

⁴⁰ Nether Hallam Election Campaign speech, 1896. 6452M, SLSL.

⁴¹ Adam, *Buying Respectability: Philanthropy and Urban Society in Transnational Perspective*, p. 89.

⁴² Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 180.

⁴³ Twells, *The Civilising Mission*, p. 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

principles and moral practices and more about attending to the social and welfare needs of Sheffield's public. It was this competition for 'social, cultural and political dominance in city affairs' that ultimately led to 'the creation of an urban cultural and social infrastructure' and furthermore, one that 'mirrored, at least initially, the fault lines between the old and new groups of the leisure class'.⁴⁸ This was the competing and evolving civic and philanthropic environment that Graves was entering into. In essence, his engagement with English philanthropy had already been socially, culturally and politically mapped, shaped and formed through the course of England's history.

As such, ventures by the welfare-minded middle classes were not new in Graves' Sheffield. His political entrance and political career shared many similarities with his philanthropic forebears with their calls for welfare reforms, urban improvements, campaigns for access to education and a similar willingness to use rate-payers' money to implant such change. In addition, through both his time spent working as a pedlar and during his apprenticeship, Graves had both personally experienced and witnessed the impact of poverty and hardship. These experiences had formed and shaped his social conscience and his propulsion onto the political stage gave him an opportunity to address his concerns. Working alongside the local council was for J. G. Graves a productive and progressive way to better and modernise the urban and social fabric of Sheffield, however it did not give him complete freedom to impart his own values and ideas. That freedom could only be achieved through a programme of philanthropy, one where he could 'take in hand' and address those issues of welfare 'that had been simmering in his mind for a long time'.⁴⁹

J. G. Graves: From Pedlar to Philanthropist

In 1941, the *Goldsmiths Journal* referred to J. G. Graves as 'Sheffield's Fairy Godfather'.⁵⁰ In 2014, the local Derbyshire journal *Dronfield Eye* suggested that J. G. Graves was one of Sheffield's and Dronfield's greatest benefactors.⁵¹ Both articles celebrated Graves' achievements and highlighted his accomplishments in business, on the civic stage and within the philanthropic arena. His philanthropic agenda was wide and diverse and it gave

⁴⁸ Adam, *Buying Respectability*, p. 89.

⁴⁹ Graves, 'Some Memories', p.64.

⁵⁰ 'Goldsmiths Journal' (January 1941), MP2232M, SLSL.

⁵¹ *Dronfield Eye* (April, 2014), Issue, 102, pp. 44-46.

Graves an opportunity to connect with the city of Sheffield other than through his business and political activities. While enabling him to personally address his concerns over issues of health, welfare, social inequality and education, he also invested his time and money in the city's urban fabric and its cultural scene. In twenty-first century Sheffield, the name of J. G. Graves is significantly remembered more for his philanthropy than for his political or business endeavours and his benevolence continues to prosper the city and its citizens through the work of the J. G. Graves Charitable Trust.⁵²

For Graves, issues of social betterment and particularly those that related to the cultivation of respectable practices and the adoption of civic virtue were high on his agenda. As an employer and within the boundaries of his firm, he could instruct and indeed expect his workforce to employ and display respectable habits and behaviours. He could also, as his programme of business welfare demonstrated, offer incentives and make provisions to induce and entice such adoption. However encouraging that adoption within the wider community required a more tailored approach. The provision of facilities and particularly those related to leisure and education gave Graves both an opportunity to express his own cultural leanings and promote their consumption in the public arena. Rational recreation involving healthy activities, pastimes and sports had long been associated with movements such as the Temperance League and the YMCA, who in the mid to late 1800s had advocated substituting the consumption of alcohol and visits to the public house with the pursuit of healthy recreational pursuits. As Beaven observes, it was hoped that by 'drawing men into respectable leisure practices' the road to 'full citizenship' could not only be 'mapped out' but 'realised'.⁵³

Producing these model citizens required a programme of financial investment and practical help. Graves had already demonstrated his eagerness to invest in morally advancing and health enriching programmes through his business welfare initiatives. Indeed, he had congratulated himself on his grasp of cross-collaborative ventures to benefit his workforce and his company. In the early 1900s he had suggested that his firm's sports ground at Roewood was a place, 'where differences of position can be forgotten ... and where rank

⁵² The J. G. Graves charitable Trust was founded in 1930 by J. G. Graves to provide financial support for both local and national projects and particularly those related to health, welfare and education. For further information see: Keith Farnsworth, *The Graves Inheritance* (Sheffield, c. 1989).

⁵³ Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men in Britain*, p. 68.

and file can meet on equal terms'.⁵⁴ In essence this same collaborative venture with the added pursuit of the respectable and the rational could be cultivated and nurtured beyond the factory gates through the provision of recreational areas for Sheffield's public. When in 1925 Graves presented Sheffield with 154 acres of parkland, 'Graves Park', he reinforced the message that it was for the 'happiness and welfare of [Sheffield's] citizens and where healthy recreation should be pursued and enjoyed'.⁵⁵ Complete with boating and fishing lakes, wooded walkways, planned tea gardens and children's play areas, it was an environment that spatially, socially and culturally divided it from the city's public houses and the 'dust and smoke' of the city.⁵⁶ Celebrated as a place for rational recreation, quiet contemplation and family orientated pursuits, Graves Park lent itself to, and harmonised with, Octavia Hill's calls in the late 1800s for the provision of outdoor recreational areas; or as Hill termed them 'open air sitting rooms for the poor' and the working classes.⁵⁷ For Hill, the provision of open space, free from the clutter of the urban environment, was fundamental to the betterment, health and welfare of a city's inhabitants. Appalled when the 'London school board closed its fifty seven playgrounds on Saturdays and in the evenings', Hill suggested that the 'owners of private space should open them up at certain times' for the benefit of the public.⁵⁸ In similar context, the parklands of urban nineteenth century modernisation, suggests urban sociologist Richard Sennett and historian Simon Gunn, began to act as the city's 'lungs'.⁵⁹ Such lungs did not just enable the town's and city's inhabitants to inhale cleaner air, but to experience a new freedom of leisure, one that was respectable, rational and healthy and displayed the practices and characteristics of a model citizen. As French anthropologist Paul Rabinow argues, there was a close interconnection between the urban space and middle class values that flowed through into the twentieth century. For Rabinow, twentieth century urban development, both 'architectural [and] spatial', possessed 'normative ends in [as] far as they were intended to produce the model

⁵⁴ 'Let's talk of Graves', p. 26.

⁵⁵ 'Munificent gift of Councillor and Mrs Graves,' Newspaper Cuttings, vol. 4, 942.74S, p. 19. The acreage of Graves Park was extended over a period of time with a further eight acres in 1930 followed by two further gifts in 1932 and 1935 which ultimately amounted to over 200 acres. Farnsworth, *The Graves Inheritance*, p. 17.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Octavia Hill, quoted in David Owen, *English Philanthropy*, p.495.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* See also: Octavia Hill, *Our Common Land* (London, 1877), pp. 130-137.

⁵⁹ Gunn, 'The Middle Class, Modernity and the Provincial City', p. 116. Gunn notes the views of Sennett who argues that nineteenth century urban improvements became analogous with the human body, roads being conceived as veins and arteries and parks as the city's lungs, see: Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilisation*.

citizen alongside a modern society'.⁶⁰ While on one hand the donation of parkland by Graves demonstrated a socio-cultural progressiveness, it also echoed an allegiance to the promotion of those values associated with sobriety and moral propriety. Graves Park was available to all, none of the acres were designated or divided, nor was there a charge to use it; indeed long gone were the days of the mid-Victorian 'walking stick avenues' with their middle class parades and parasol promenades.⁶¹ Yet, while Graves' benevolence was undoubtedly a vital contribution to the health and welfare of Sheffield's citizens and certainly echoed with the meanings of progress and social inclusivity, its donation could also be viewed as culturally divisive. While socially the parkland encouraged the working classes to enjoy outdoor activities, culturally those activities remained tied to the pursuit of the rational and the respectable.

Benefactors such as Graves were determined to oversee these engaging and socially interactive programmes of rational recreation and his gift of moorland on the edge of Sheffield's boundary clearly demonstrated this. In 1933, Ethel Gallimore, a leading member of the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), and daughter of previous Master Cutler, T. W. Ward, approached Graves in the hope of securing financial support to purchase 448 acres of moorland known as Blackamoor.⁶² Gallimore was concerned that the moorland located on the edge of the Peak District could be swallowed up by developers and subsequently lost as an area of natural beauty and conservation. Graves agreed to Gallimore's request, purchased the land and donated it to Sheffield 'as an open space for public enjoyment in perpetuity'.⁶³ While this was a coup for Gallimore and the CPRE it was also a coup for Graves. Not only did the purchase of the land reinforce his civic standing and influence, it also allowed him to push forward his message that a socially inclusive yet culturally attuned programme of respectable and rational recreation should be encouraged and could be embraced by all. The purchase of Blackamoor provided families and friends, ramblers, hikers, cyclists, picnickers, school parties and day trippers a place from which to escape the dust and grime of the city, pursue and experiment with new leisure activities,

⁶⁰ Paul Rabinow quoted in Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*, pp. 121-122.

⁶¹ For further reading on walking stick avenues, parades, promenades and parklands see: Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, pp. 60-78.

⁶² David Price, *Sheffield Troublemakers: Rebels and Radicals in Sheffield History* (Stroud, 2012), pp. 128-129.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

and enjoy what became colloquially known as a 'playground for urban dwellers'.⁶⁴ The gift of Blackamoor, noted *The Times* in 1933, amounted to the 'preserve of a great open space for the people of Sheffield'.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the report concluded, 'Sheffield's' now most 'famous Alderman' had provided 'over one thousand acres' of recreational land for the benefit of local citizens.⁶⁶ Providing such spaces for leisure was important and as the countryside grew in 'popularity as a playground for urban dwellers', access to 'the dales and hills and moors' increased the pursuits of hiking, rambling, cycling, mountaineering, camping and youth hostelling.⁶⁷ Graves, a keen cyclist and walker himself, saw the dual benefits of the purchase. Preservation and conservation of the Moorland was important for Sheffield and its public; it addressed the concerns from environmentalists such as Gallimore, staved off urban development and simultaneously helped to augment a culture of the healthy, the respectable and the rational. As Taylor notes, these pursuits 'sustained a dense network of local clubs and societies' many of which were linked to such organisations as the 'Workers Education Association, churches and political parties and numerous Clarion clubs'.⁶⁸

Blackamoor was one of Graves' most impressive gifts and one which gave him the ultimate 'satisfaction in the thought that it [was] now preserved from the encroachment of the builder and [would] be accessible to [Sheffield's] working population for [their] recreation for all time'.⁶⁹ Adding to these environmental and indeed culturally related acts of philanthropy, Graves also donated Concord Park (149 acres) in the north of the city, teamed up with the Corporation and Town Trustees in 1927 and contributed £10,000 for the purchase of Ecclesall woods (an ancient woodland standing at over three hundred acres), and preserved the site of Forge Dam house at Fulwood.⁷⁰ In addition, Graves preserved one of Sheffield's most important sites of industrial heritage: the Abbeydale Industrial Works. Dating back to the thirteenth century and one of Sheffield's largest water-powered

⁶⁴ John Stevenson, 'The Countryside, Planning and Civil Society in Britain Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British history*, p. 197.

⁶⁵ *The Times* (February 28, 1933), p. 12.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Richard Hoggart quoted in Stevenson, 'The Countryside, Planning and Civil Society', p. 197.

⁶⁸ Harvey Taylor quoted in Stevenson, 'The Countryside, Planning and Civil Society', p. 198. See also: Harvey Taylor, *A Claim on the Countryside; A History of the British Outdoor Movement* (Edinburgh, 1997).

⁶⁹ Graves, 'Some Memories', p. 61

⁷⁰ For more information on all of these gifts see: Farnsworth, *The Graves Inheritance*, pp. 17-20.

industrial sites, its preservation by J. G. Graves secured its future as a site of historic interest.⁷¹

While preservation, conservation and the provision of outdoor recreational space occupied one aspect of Graves' philanthropy, he also sought to invest his time and money in the promotion of the arts and education. Funding part of the cost of the city centre's Art Gallery and new library was not only a personal achievement for Graves, who was himself a keen art collector, but its development sat neatly in line with Sheffield's modernising urban fabric.⁷² Taking three years to complete, the building which housed the library on the lower floors and the gallery on the top floor was finally opened amidst great celebrations in 1934, the occasion of which was presided over by the Duchess of York.⁷³ With extensive facilities and gifts of artwork by internationally acclaimed artists such as Collinson, Raeburn, Murillo, Wilson and Legros, the Art Gallery formed an important cultural centre of entertainment.⁷⁴ Unlike the city's Mappin Gallery, which 'housed a static display of popular mid-Victorian pictures', Graves' Art Gallery was centrally located and easily accessible for the viewing public.⁷⁵ It was this accessibility that Graves had originally honed in on. In a letter to the Lord Mayor in 1929, Graves had suggested that 'there was much in favour of a central institution for future Art Gallery extension – [which] may interest and influence a wider public - be readily accessible to the Art student and scholars of the city – and workers generally'.⁷⁶ Graves' enthusiasm and financial support for the art gallery reaped its reward. In the first year of its opening, it was reported to have attracted up to 200,000 visitors, and delighted with its popularity, Graves encouraged late night openings and visits by organised school parties.⁷⁷ The diversity of the gallery's collection added to its attraction which included a collection of Grice carved ivories, Japanese colour-prints from woodcuts, Chinese silk paintings and five original paintings by Walt Disney, previously used in the making of

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-21. See also: Newspaper Collections, Vol's: 25 and 27, 942.74SF SL5L.

⁷² The total cost was £140,000 to which Graves contributed £20,000 with a further £10,000 towards the cost of the library. For further information see: Barnes, 'J. G. Graves: Sheffield Businessman, Art Collector and Benefactor', p. 9.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24. See also Farnsworth, *The Graves Inheritance*, p. 45.

⁷⁶ Letter from J. G. Graves quoted in Barnes, 'J. G. Graves: Sheffield Businessman, Art Collector and Benefactor', p. 11.

⁷⁷ Farnsworth, *The Graves Inheritance*, p. 45.

Disney's film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.⁷⁸ These diverse and generous gifts donated by Graves were designed to attract a wide social audience of visitors, whet their appetites and encourage further visits. In similar fashion to the parklands, the art gallery provided an amenity and indeed a valuable route by which the working and lower middle classes, families and friends could come together and consume a culturally enriched programme of respectable and rational recreation. For Kate Hill, such institutions were not only seen as a form of improvement for the working classes but also symbolised municipal progress.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Adelman's review of Hill's analysis concludes that the municipal provision of such cultural centres also demonstrate[d] the links between the provision of civic governance and the provision of "culture".⁸⁰ When in 1933 the *Sheffield Telegraph* commented upon Graves' donation of £16,000 for the reconstruction of Western Park Museum, it suggested that 'the gift not only form[ed] another important link in the chain of educational centres of which Sheffield [was] now forging' but signalled an 'ardent desire to see Sheffield well in the lead as a cultural and educational centre'.⁸¹ Such rhetoric echoed Graves' liberal notions of progress and civilisation.

For J. G. Graves, philanthropy was an all-encompassing programme and his generosity brought huge benefits to Sheffield and its citizens. Graves was not only a benefactor for the promotion of the arts, culture and rational recreation, but he also invested in a wide range of welfare initiatives including housing, educational facilities, hospitals, donations to national charities and appeals, and the provision of children's facilities. In terms of health and medicine, Graves presented student nurses with a home at Tapton Court, contributed to the cost of extensions for the Royal Infirmary and Children's Hospital, provided much needed medical equipment for hospitals across Sheffield and funded the cost of radiotherapy research for the treatment of malignant diseases.⁸² Indeed it was this latter

⁷⁸ Graves presented a collection of Grice carved ivories to the gallery following his retirement from the city council in 1939. See: K. Farnsworth. p. 45. For information on the other listed items see: 'Sheffield's Fairy Godfather,' *Goldsmiths Journal* (January 1941), p. 164.

⁷⁹ For a wider analysis of municipal museums, galleries and social progression see: Kate Hill, *Culture and Class in English Museums, 1850-1914* (Oxford, 2016).

⁸⁰ Juliana Adelman, Book Review of Kate Hill's *Culture and Class in English Museums, 1850-1914*, in *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (April 2006), pp. 436-438.

⁸¹ 'Reconstruction of Western Park Museum' (1933), Newspaper Cuttings vol. 27, pp. 60-61 & 108. 942.74SF. SLSL. See also 'Presentation of Crosspool Land, Ornamental Gardens and Munificent gifts to Sheffield', Newspaper Cuttings, vol. 27, p. 61. 942.74S; Tapton Court: Newspaper Cuttings, Vol 27, 942.74SF. SLSL.

⁸² Farnsworth, *The Graves Inheritance*, pp. 46-49.

contribution that spurred on the later development of Western Park hospital, now a national centre of excellence for the treatment and palliative care of cancer patients.⁸³ These munificent gifts not only prospered Sheffield but its citizens too. Recalling the development of over two hundred social houses for the elderly, Graves described their funding as an act of 'public usefulness', the rent of which, he insisted, would remain a 'nominal sum well within the [financial] capacity of their tenants'.⁸⁴ Designed to accommodate Sheffield's elderly population, the houses' locations were carefully chosen for their 'outlook, space, pure air, access to transport [and] nearness to churches, places of entertainment and shops'.⁸⁵ While not in a position to copy the much larger construction of villages such as Leverhulme's Port Sunlight and Cadbury's Bourneville, Graves' Trust houses captured the essence of these shared visions by businessmen with a social conscience.⁸⁶ Simultaneously they also validated and demonstrated Graves' philanthropic ethos; address the practical, promote the moral and endorse the spiritual.

Graves clearly signalled his grasp of philanthropy and its ability to engage in a large and diverse programme of both socially inclusive and socially advancing agendas. Regularly donating gifts to Sheffield University, he funded the construction and furnishing of Sheffield University's student union building in 1936, sponsored the cost of visiting speakers, and supported research, exhibitions and educational displays.⁸⁷ These programmes not only reflected Graves' eagerness to engage with the city's educational sector, but also reinforced the message that education was a valuable commodity which should be embraced and available to all. For Graves, education was the route to social progress and social progress reinforced practices of good citizenship. In essence, Graves' philanthropic compass was keenly balanced to reflect the social, the moral, the health and the welfare of Sheffield's development and that of its citizens.

⁸³ Graves and the charitable trust also provided funds for a diverse array of other projects, examples of which included donations to Great Ormond Street Hospital, The British Red Cross, the Lifeboat Institute, provisions for the elderly and cinematograph equipment for prisoners in Strangeways. For a detailed list see: Farnsworth, *The Graves Inheritance*.

⁸⁴ Graves, 'Some Memories', pp. 63-64.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁸⁶ Graves was known to have visited Port Sunlight and Bourneville and shared his social concerns with Leverhulme and Cadbury. See: Graves, 'Some Memories', p. 38.

⁸⁷ Farnsworth, *The Graves Inheritance*, pp. 49-51.

In summary, Graves' engagement with philanthropy echoed the philosophy of J. S. Mill who suggested that 'the worth of a state, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it, and a State which postpones the interests of their mental expansion and elevation ... will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished'.⁸⁸ When Graves suggested that employees 'did not solely exist for the use and betterment of the employing portion of the community, but had their own physical and mental needs' it could be argued that he was speaking from inside the factory gates.⁸⁹ However that message was extended into the wider community through his programmes of philanthropy; a programme designed to aid social inclusion, promote civic respectability, address health and welfare issues and expose pockets of social inertia. It could promote self-help, education and cultural attainment and it could circumnavigate the divide between the rougher pastimes associated with a working class leisure and the pursuit of rational recreation.

While Graves' programme of philanthropy can still be tangibly witnessed through the contributions he made to the city's urban and wider rural environment and the conservation of Sheffield's heritage, understanding it in terms of a social and moral agenda is more complicated, simply because of its complexity of meanings. Undoubtedly however, Graves' contributions on both the local political platform and through his programme of philanthropy left Sheffield and its citizens all the more enriched. When John George Graves wrote his biography he spoke of his first and lasting impressions of Sheffield; it is only fitting to leave the last words of this final chapter to him:

Probably no large town or city has suffered so much in reputation by people who know next to nothing about it, as Sheffield has. Thousands of travellers who have arrived at either railway station, or who have passed through by train have pictured Sheffield as a smoke beclouded place in which there is perpetual gloom and in which dwells a race of hard-working people deprived of natural refreshment and open-air pleasure. This was very much the kind of impression I received of Sheffield when I arrived here in the year of 1880. But as the years

⁸⁸ John Stuart Mill, quoted in Michael Freeden, 'Civil Society and the Good Citizen' in Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History*, p. 282.

⁸⁹ Graves, 'Some Memories', pp.58-59.

have passed I came to regard Sheffield as the most lovable of all the wage-earning places in the British Empire and beyond.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ J. G. Graves. 'Some Memories'. p. 55. Quote re-produced with the kind permission of Sheffield Local Studies Library.

Conclusion

In summary, while John George Graves has often been recognised for his philanthropic activities, his contributions to the activity of retailing and British consumer culture have received little attention. However his entrepreneurial skills and astute mind for business demonstrated his determination to develop a successful business and compete with his retailing contemporaries. Albeit on a smaller scale to that of his American counterparts, Graves was developing his business in an environment that was conducive to mail order retailing. Aided by Britain's infrastructure, the modernising urban environment and a changing consumer culture, Graves recognised that mail order did have a sustainable place within the British retailing sector. While the modernising city centre shopping facilities could have inhibited its growth, it did not. However, maintaining that growth and the firm's popularity relied upon the cooperation of the British Post Office. As the Post Office dragged its heels and refused to accommodate the needs of the firm, Graves publicly expressed his frustration by creating disturbances at the city's post office and generating support through street protests. Attracting national attention for both Graves and the Post Office and generating debates in the House of Commons, the dispute's resolution was finally achieved when the Post Office recognised its need to modernise and adapt its programme to meet the demands of a changing retailing environment.

The key elements of Graves' business lay in its provision of credit, offers of convenience and effective communication. Overcoming the haptic was not an obstacle for Graves; neither was filling the void of the missing shop worker. The careful and systematic production and distribution of enticing catalogues and secondary advertising literature successfully overcame this void by providing a surrogate form of social interaction and sales narrative. While the firm initially used agents and advocates to promote the business and sell its wares, their recruitment and secondment, particularly when compared to the firm's contemporaries Kilbourne Kay and the Fattorinis, appeared to be fleeting. While agents did have the ability to create consumption communities through the recognition of shared desires, needs and social interaction, Graves' preference for direct sales led him to rely on the production of enticing sales literature and advertising prowess. The production of his marketing material (which shared similarities with the American versions) was selectively adapted to reflect the wants and needs of the British consumer. In addition the catalogues

with their marketing narrative incorporated a wealth of contemporary views, echoed national sentiments and attempted to provoke social discourse. In essence, the firm's marketing material had the capacity to encourage both the consumption of the tangible commodity alongside the consumption of the intangible concept, philosophy, value, identity and moral instruction. They also provided Graves with a platform upon which he could voice and share his own views, echo his concerns and seek to inform and educate his customers.

While this supply of intangible consumption was an addendum to the firm's retailing prowess, its credit programme provided the impetus and enticement to consume the firm's products. Payment via instalments was an integral component of Graves' business model and the businessman ensured it echoed with meanings of respectability and social inclusion. Its early promotion was however also heavily gendered. Targeted at men rather than women the scheme's advertisement's conformed to the prescriptively gendered rhetoric of the period. Despite this, payment via instalments was an astute business strategy, one that not only popularised the mail order sector, but as Coopey noted, proved to be a vital factor in the popularisation of mail order and a practice soon followed by the businessman's competitors.¹

The firm's vast variety of products was designed to fill the needs, wants and desires of a wide audience of consumers. For Graves and his firm, the activity of consumption was not just about meeting essential needs, nor was it just for the wealthy or for those with ready cash in their pocket. Consumption was also about self-betterment, achievement and self-attainment. It was about lifestyle, demonstrations of civic respectability, comfort and the pursuit of the rational. While Graves' retailing programme offered choice, convenience and a respectable form of credit, his engineered, systematic and structured advertising programme with its use of marketing hooks, codes, nuances and imagery continually reinforced and attached those values to consumer practices. Furthermore, whatever social class the customer felt they belonged to, they were all subjected to this meaningful interconnectedness. Encouraged to aspire and engage with contemporary values, concepts and ideologies, the firm's commodities came attached with a wealth of meanings and messages, ranging from the Smilesean ideology of hard-work and self-betterment to displays of sophistication through the labelling and titling of goods. Exaggerating the

¹ Coopey et al., *Mail Order Retailing in Britain*, p. 19.

concepts of Britishness and a constructed identity, the labels of *Harrogate*, *Mayfair*, *Sandringham* and *Kew* echoed with the meanings of class and good taste. Also ushering in these socio-cultural connotations were labels carrying a continental association and fashions embroidered with such titles as *Dantzig*, *Elysees*, *Etoile* and *Trocadero* more than nodded at the concepts of class, style, status and sophistication.

Graves' marketing material was not only designed to sell the commodity but a wealth of contemporary concepts, values and ideas. Those concepts and values were also associated with the meanings and messages of gender. As the catalogues' descriptive sales narrative leaned heavily towards the use of gendered nuances, the activity of consumption and consumer goods aligned with a gendered division of public and private spaces. While women were either inclined to experience a domestic fever or were reverently associated with such concepts as pretty, gentle, adorning or refined, men were exposed to and associated with the conceptual rhetoric of success, attainment, achievement and civic respectability. For Graves, the profitability of the company depended upon the sale of goods and augmenting and attracting those sales revolved as much around selling an associated concept as it did selling the commodity. Whether customers consumed both the concept and the commodity would be difficult to determine, but the persuasive language was all too evident.

That persuasive language was particularly evident on issues of empire. Graves was not only intent on tapping into the imperial market by establishing his own foreign sales department but was also determined to air his views on matters of empire to his customers. The catalogues and supplementary marketing material gave him the platform he sought. Decrying the government's lack of planning during the Boer war was one such article designed to educate and enlighten his customers. Engaging with this interconnectedness between consumption, retailing, empire and mail order was not only a clever marketing strategy to sustain the attention of consumers, but also displayed Graves' grasp of the contradictions and conflicts associated with imperial issues. Moreover, the Empire also provided Graves with an added business opportunity both at home and abroad. Providing domestic customers with goods that echoed their imperial affiliation, (either through design, manufacturing or fine detailing) allowed Graves to connect both the business operations and customers to the meanings of empire. Furthermore, the consumption of goods through the

firm's credit system provided customers living on a budget an opportunity to associate their fashions, homes and lifestyles with these imperial affiliations. Securing the loyalty of colonists abroad was another element of empire that Graves sought to tap into. While the figures of such sales no longer exist, the primary evidence that is available certainly recognises Graves' determined attempts to capture the attention of this consumer audience. In addition, Graves was determined to ensure his domestic customers were kept informed of his imperial investments, even if such information veered towards a jingoistic rhetoric and contained somewhat spurious and exaggerated claims. While suggesting that life for the colonists could be challenging and unpredictable may have held some truth, suggesting they were continually subjected to practices of imposition and deception by foreign traders was certainly jingoistic in tone, even if it did make business sense. Without doubt, the firm's attempts to trade with the empire were all encompassing. They not only involved the sale of commodities, but also the airing of personal convictions and speculative menus of marketing discourse.

The rapid growth of Graves' business not only benefitted the British consumer but also Sheffield's working population. Providing a wealth of employment opportunities for both men and women, the firm's employment opportunities ranged from manual labourers, artisans and craftsmen to accountants, administrators, clerks, printers, tailors, technicians, watch makers and departmental managers. While the evidence suggests that many positions were gendered and women were restricted in their roles (certainly during the early phase of the firm's operations), women nevertheless made up a significant proportion of the staff structure. However the working facilities and environment that Graves sought to bestow upon his staff were modern, comfortable and enlightened. The grand and centralised administration centre located on the outskirts of the city centre was not only a model of inspiration but described as a tribute to modern architecture. Its facilities included a modern heating system, cloak rooms, restaurant, reading room, gardens and conservatory. These were not only intended to provide a conducive and comfortable working environment, but also one that supported, embraced and encouraged the pursuit of the respectable, the educational and the rational. Such pursuits were also encouraged outside of the factory gates and Graves' provision of a sports ground along with his encouragement of staff to form respectable social and educational groups was certainly in

line with other socially conscious businessmen such as Rowntree, Cadbury and Leverhulme. Similarly, Graves' introduction of sick pay, holiday entitlement and pension scheme were all issues of business welfarism shared by those business contemporaries. However his introduction of a pension scheme did precede those of Rowntree, Cadbury and Leverhulme.

However as this thesis has highlighted, such attention to issues of business welfarism was not all about benevolence. Both Graves and his contemporaries shared the view that looking after their workers was as much about benefitting the company and securing profits as it was about securing the welfare of staff. In essence these welfare programmes still echoed with a degree of Victorian paternalism; a paternalism which sought to foster an engagement with the practices of self-improvement and encourage the adoption of responsibility, respectability and accountability. While the business welfare policies undoubtedly benefitted the workforce, they were rooted in an ethos of middle class values and a menu of paternalistic employer practices.

Graves' success in business provided him with a financial fortune and catapulted him onto the civic stage. Attaining both civic standing through the local political arena and through his programme of philanthropy proved beneficial for both the city and its residents. For Graves the entrance into both local politics and philanthropy provided him with an opportunity to express his ideologies, beliefs and moral leanings into the wider community. While the political platform provided him with an opportunity to echo and address his concerns on issues such as unfair representation, inadequate housing, poor sanitation and improved educational opportunities, his philanthropic engagements were as socially wide as they were culturally varied. While providing funding for hospital extensions, equipment, medical research and accommodation for student nurses, Graves' contributions towards the research in radiography maintains its tangible legacy into the twenty-first century through Sheffield's Western Park Hospital.

Further programmes benefitting from Graves' altruism included housing for the elderly, the provision of safe recreational playgrounds for children, funding for the provision of a student union building, sponsoring visiting lecturers and the provision of city centre recreational areas. However it was Graves' attention to culture, preservation, conservation and the provision of leisure facilities that continues to remain much in evidence. While his

contributions to the construction and preservation of Graves Art gallery and Western Park Museum continues to provide a cultural menu of recreation, his preservation of Sheffield's industrial heritage sites uniquely combines and preserves a symbiotically aligned legacy of Sheffield's history. The gifting of many acres of parklands, the preservation of woodlands and the conservation of moorland to the south of the city are also poignant reminders of Graves' generosity.

Both Graves' civic and philanthropic activities correspond with and complement the secondary evidence and particularly the suggestion that civic elites were increasingly being forged from local business operatives who had an affinity for their own towns and cities. They not only shared that familiar environment but encountered and witnessed its social, cultural, political and economic diversity. While Sheffield was not Graves' native home it was the city that gave him an opportunity to put into practice his 'business turn of mind'.² That 'business turn of mind' not only proved profitable for a nation of British consumers, but also for Sheffield and its citizens. John George Graves' contributions to retailing, business welfare, consumer culture and civic engagement have lacked recognition and been omitted from academic research for far too long. It is hoped that this thesis has gone some way to rectify that omission.

² Graves, 'Some Memories', p. 10.

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